

EXPLORATIONS OF THE VERNACULAR IN
RABELAIS, DU BELLAY, AND MONTAIGNE

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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May 2012

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Cornell University 2012

ABSTRACT

In this study, I examine communication in the vernacular in the works of François Rabelais, Joachim Du Bellay, and Michel de Montaigne. I analyze these issues in tandem with similar concerns in early modern French and Italian treatises on the vernacular, and argue that, pervasive in the literature of the period, they are best studied with a sociolinguistic eye, focusing less on orthographic and lexicographic changes in the vernacular, and more on issues that question regional dialect and ideas of ‘speaking naturally’ and ‘mother tongue.’

In chapter one, I study Rabelais’ use of the vernacular, and argue that via the regional dialects he elects for his characters, he is subtly promoting his own dialectal preferences, which reflect those of the sixteenth-century society he lived in. I examine Rabelais in conjunction with the Italian *questione della lingua*, and argue that his vision of the vernacular is distinct from Dante’s vision of a *lingua curiale*. In electing the dialects of the Loire

Valley and Ile-de-France as superior dialects in his books, he actually shares much with promoters of the Florentine dialect, such as Machiavelli.

In chapter two, I look at vernacular sources in the poetry of Du Bellay. I argue that while the young Du Bellay has ambitions for ‘embellishing’ and ‘illustrating’ the vernacular, he ultimately regrets abandoning native, French sources. I examine Du Bellay’s claims about French in the *Deffence* with those of an adversary, Barthélémy Aneau, and show that in his own career, Du Bellay realizes to be true everything that Aneau criticizes him for, including his failure to recognize the links between France’s linguistic history and its national literary history.

In chapter three, I study Montaigne’s paradoxical relationship with the vernacular. I examine the author’s desire to create a personalized system of communication within the restraints of a necessarily societally-determined vernacular. I also examine the author’s anxiety about composing in a linguistic system which he senses is constantly changing. I look at this in tandem with similar claims by the treatise-writer Charles Bovelles, and examine the theme of Babel in the works of both.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ashley Demeaus Brandenburg was born and raised in rural Michigan and received her B.A. in French from The Honors College at Michigan State University in 2004. After spending a year and a half living and working in France, Ashley commenced her doctoral work at Cornell University in the Department of Romance Studies in 2006. She currently resides in Phoenix, Arizona.

This work is dedicated to my husband, Drew, my parents, Richard and Susan, and to my brother, John Paul.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In completing this project, I am beholden to my three special committee members, Professors William Kennedy, Kathleen Long, and Marilyn Migiel, for their continuing support of my (sometimes obstinate) interest in early modern vernacular treatises and for their overall excellence as academic mentors. Professor Migiel helped me to struggle through early Italian texts which ultimately proved to be illuminating and essential to my examination of the vernacular in sixteenth-century France. Professor Long introduced me to Rabelais in an Independent Study my first year at Cornell, and also instilled in me a deep appreciation for the ‘weird’ side of early modern literature. But lastly, and most importantly, I am indebted to Professor Kennedy for the many suggestions and annotations made to the various stages of this project; his vast knowledge of early modern Europe provided insight and new directions for examinations of the vernacular that I might never have explored on my own.

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INTRODUCTION

Qu'est-ce que la France pour moi ? C'est d'abord une géographie incroyablement variée. Quel autre pays offre à l'intérieur d'un périmètre aussi réduit des régions aussi différentes que la Bretagne et l'Auvergne, les Alpes et le Midi ? Mais la France, c'est surtout pour moi la langue française, cet héritage incomparable que nous offrent Rabelais, Montaigne, Balzac, Victor Hugo et Paul Valéry. Et, bien entendu, l'incitation qu'ils transmettent de faire "œuvre française" à leur exemple.¹

What is France for me? It's first of all an incredibly varied geography. What other country offers such different regions as Brittany and Auvergne, the Alps and Midi within such a small perimeter?

But France is above all for me the French language, this incomparable heritage that we have in Rabelais, Montaigne, Balzac, Victor Hugo and Paul Valéry. And, of course, the

¹ Michel Tournier, "La France, c'est la langue," *Le Point*, January 13, 2011, http://www.lepoint.fr/culture/la-france-c-est-la-langue-13-01-2011-129538_3.php.

incitation that we receive from them to make “French works”
in their example.

I chose to open this study with a twenty-first century quotation to anchor a key part of my argument: that French identity is historically and inextricably linked with the French vernacular, and in efforts to control ‘French-ness,’ much has been done over the centuries to establish the legitimacy and regulation of this mother tongue. While the above citation is from 2011, it is entirely relevant to the sixteenth-century authors and treatise writers addressed in this study.

I took this citation from a recent short piece by the *Prix Goncourt* author Michel Tournier in a special issue of the periodical, *Le Point*, focusing on the issue of French identity. It is particularly pertinent to the present study because it points to two issues of ‘French’ uniqueness that our three sixteenth-century authors dwelled upon as well: their French *literary heritage* and their *regional* identity. So it’s not surprising that two of the authors in my study also made Tournier’s list of French models to emulate in making “oeuvre français,” as they shared with the twentieth-first-century author similar hesitations over vernacular identity.

The identity of France has been linked to its national language for centuries, probably more significantly so than for any other Western

European country. The importance of linguistic identity to the French psyche can be difficult to comprehend for those from nations where language is not such a central political and social issue; to put this in perspective, American readers might consider the fact that while the United States does not give any legal authority to the *de-facto* status of English as its official language, French's status as the official language of France has been part of that country's constitution since 1992, and there have been scores of laws in France's history governing not only how and when French must be used, but even when the use of regional dialects is permissible. While Anglophones certainly have dictionaries and grammar books to turn to when questions over 'proper' usage might arise, French speakers have an even greater resource in their *Académie française*, an officially (although not entirely legally) sanctioned organization dedicated to keeping the French language well-ordered and 'pure' from foreign influence since the seventeenth century. The use and regulation of the vernacular in France is nothing short of a national obsession, which has branched out into a Francophone obsession, as other Francophone states and countries seem to be equally anxious about the status and usage of the French tongue and its regional variants.

I became interested in sixteenth-century French vernacular anxieties because of my studies on language in another country and during a different

century; that of twentieth-century Francophone Canada. Growing up in rural, central Michigan only two hours away from the Ontarian border, I was always fascinated by the shared official status of English and French in Canada, and I became even more intrigued when as an undergraduate, I read about the *Loi 101* and the *Charte de la langue française* and the social and political turmoil surrounding them. There was clearly a quality inherent to French that caused its native speakers to fight for it in this fanatical way that no English-speaker ever would. As a requirement for The Honors College at Michigan State University, I finished my undergraduate studies by completing my senior honors thesis on the sociopolitical status of French in modern-day Canada. Because of this early fascination, when I commenced my doctoral studies at Cornell University, I was earnestly considering a career as a Francophone-Canadian specialist with a sociolinguistic focus. This all changed, of course, when I was introduced to the sixteenth century and Du Bellay's notorious *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise*, and realized that in order to understand any of the linguistic anxieties of modern-day French speakers—no matter where they might be—it would be necessary to go back at least four hundred years and see where the seed of these anxieties was first planted.

Indeed, the first 'official' documents to regulate the use of French

appeared not in recent times, but rather, in the early modern era. Sixteenth-century France was in frenzy over the use of the vernacular. This passion was driven in part by the Protestant Reformation; after Luther translated the Bible into German, many other reformers followed suite with translations into other vernaculars, as well as with the extensive publication and distribution of vernacular pamphlets on religion. For the first time in European history, important religious texts were accessible outside of a select group of the very erudite elite. While the Catholic Church was still (and would remain for quite some time) a Latinate institution in the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation challenged Latin's status as the official language of religion and gave headway to the vernacular.

However, in this study, we will not be looking to Germany or the Reform to answers about the vernacular in France, but will rely heavily on the influence of another close neighbor—Italy—and more specifically, on the *questione della lingua* debates which took place in that country in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Dating back to Dante Alighieri's *De vulgari eloquentia* and *Convivio* in the thirteenth century, the Italian *Questione* revolves around three main queries: 1. Should literature be written in Italian or Latin?; 2. If Italian is used, which dialect should be favored as the standard (Tuscan or non-Tuscan varieties)? and; 3. What stage of literary language

should be imitated in writings—archaic *Trecento* (especially that version used by Petrarch and Boccaccio) or modern usage?

Despite the many differing voices and viewpoints in the debates, the central concern was that of establishing a vernacular norm for Italian literature. The question is first raised by Dante, who in his *Convivio* and *De vulgari eloquentia* presents the possibility of a *lingua curiale* which would combine the best traits of many different dialects to create a sort of ‘universal’ Italian for writing to a wider audience. His idea of a *lingua curiale* is taken up and transformed in the 1500s by the advocates of courtly language, such as Castiglione. However, contrary to Dante’s *lingua curiale*, *la lingua cortegiana* was not an artificial construction, but rather, that which resulted naturally from intercultural exchange. The necessity of a dialectal standard is also adapted by pro-Tuscan advocates such as Pietro Bembo, who argued not only for Tuscan, but for a literary standard based on an archaic version of that dialect, best represented by Petrarch and Boccaccio. Finally, the idea of ‘natural’ language—which will transfer over to the French side of the debates—is highlighted in treatises such as the Paduan Sperone Speroni’s *Dialogo delle lingue*.

Under all of these debates is an inherent anxiety of communication, or more specifically, anxiety over *communicating in the vernacular*. Latin held an

unwavering advantage over Italian because it provided a unified written language that allowed communication not only among Italians, but among all learned people on the European continent. The one point of agreement in the entire *Questione* may arguably be that of the inevitability of standardization: language in a speech community must be regulated by some sort of norms in order to be understood by all members of the speech community. Cinquecento Italy, linguistically diverse as it was, lacked the homogeneity of one single literary dialect. If the variety of the *Questione* dialogues tells us anything, it is that the standard which Italian took—archaic, Tuscan, courtly, etc.—ultimately was less important to the dialoguers than was the overarching goal of successful communication via linguistic unification.

In many ways, the Italian *Questione della lingua* paved the way for debates on the status of the French vernacular in the sixteenth century. The question of a literary vernacular is again at play in France, but the question of a dialectic standard virtually disappears. Instead, there is a great deal of disquiet over the orthographic system in the burgeoning French vernacular. Unlike Italians, whose native tongue has roots closer to Latin and less tainted by foreign influence, follows a fairly phonetic system of spelling, sixteenth-century Francophones could only bemoan the discord between

how their language looked on paper and how it sounded spoken aloud. Before the standardizing efforts of the *Académie Française*, written French varied not only from region to region, but from writer to writer, and there were often disparities within a single writer's own work. Fear over miscommunication through a lack of orthographic standardization spurred a virulent series of treatises in the 1550s. Headed by Louis Meigret, a grammarian who argued for and devised a phonetic system for French spelling, the debates ultimately resulted in little in the way of orthographic standardization; French would remain to be written in wildly different ways until the 1700s and the reforms of the *Académie*.

As in Italy, sixteenth-century anxieties over communication in France are directed towards the elaboration of a national French vernacular so that it could equal the literary accomplishments of Classical Latin. Perhaps even more so than on the Italian side, the French focus is on poetic imitation to meet this goal. The argument focuses on who to imitate—Classical sources or French predecessors, and if French predecessors, specifically which ones?—rather than on which dialectal variant of a language to use. Still, the concept that the vernacular could be used to equal the literary achievements of Latin and Greek, first born in the Cinquecento *Questione*, is key for the French debates, and the disquiet over communication, with the goal of

linguistic (and, to many extents, stylistic) uniformity to promote literary excellence in the vernacular remains at the core of the debate in France as in Italy.

In examining the debates on the vernacular in sixteenth-century France, we must not study them as an isolated entity, only affecting those treatise writers who took part in them directly. Indeed, communication in the vernacular was a major concern for Renaissance Humanism, and the same issues about human language and communication that arise in both the Italian *questione della lingua* and the French language debates emerge in many of the major works of sixteenth-century literature. In this study, I look at these vernacular anxieties in the works of three very significant—but also very diverse—sixteenth-century French authors: Francois Rabelais, Joachim Du Bellay, and Michel de Montaigne. I chose these three authors because they cover three very different literary genres—the parodic heroic epic prose fiction for Rabelais, lyric poetry for Du Bellay, and the essay for Montaigne—and because their careers span virtually the entire sixteenth century. With the range that these authors span both chronologically and genre-wise, a study of all three better represents the breadth of this anxiety about vernacular communication in the sixteenth century than an in-depth examination of just one author could do.

Moreover, while numerous modern critics have explored linguistic issues in each of these authors' works, whenever they explore them in tandem with early modern vernacular treatises and debates, they generally focus on issues such as orthographical reform or lexicography, issues which are patent in the texts and which call for little in the way of analysis. In my study, I put aside the traditional examinations of spelling and 'words' and instead focus on subjects more of a *sociolinguistic* nature—issues such as 'speaking naturally,' mother tongues, and regional dialects. While regional dialect is a major preoccupation of the *questione delle lingua* debates in Italy, it appears on more of a minute level in the French language treatises. Nonetheless, I argue that even though arguments about dialectal varieties enable subtle inclusions in the French debates, they speak to much larger societal trends and preferences in France which are also echoed in the major literary works of the period.

Behind the desire for linguistic standardization that is a common concern in both French and Italian language treatises is an anxiety over what happens when the linguistic diversity within a particular community becomes too stratified, and communication is impeded. This is an anxiety with Biblical roots, stemming back to the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. It is not surprising that the theme of Babel is common to the language

debates of both Italy and France, as both nations had to find a way to effectively communicate within their diverse linguistic demographics. The Babel problem can be seen, for example, in Rabelais' literature, with episodes of communicative breakdown including the *écolier limousin* episode as well as in the first encounter with Panurge in *Pantagruel* IX. Montaigne, who touts communication as the most worthy human activity in his *Essais*, also ponders the lasting effects of linguistic diversity in France; he dreams of the possibility of a totally personalized language, unconstrained by any external system, but simultaneously worries about successful communication in the vernacular, which he senses is changing more and more every day. Even Du Bellay, who considers himself a linguistic expatriate while working in Italy, feels the effects of Babel when, separated from his native tongue and native inspiration, is unable to produce the verse he knew himself capable of in France. Du Bellay's vernacular anxieties culminate in the author's abandonment of the French language for Latin in his late work, the *Poemata*.

In order to illustrate the pervasiveness of vernacular anxieties in sixteenth-century French literature, I stray away from the canonical treatise writers (with the exception of Du Bellay and Geofroy Tory), and instead look at some lesser-known authors. In my research for this project, I was surprised by how many times the relatively unfamiliar names Abel Mathieu,

Barthélémy Aneau, and Charles Bovelles appeared in the footnotes to the books and articles I was reading. Despite remaining fairly anonymous in the history of the French language, the treatises these men wrote on the vernacular have much to offer in any study of sixteenth-century French.

In my chapter on Rabelais, I explore the vernacular particularly in terms of regional dialect. Although this author didn't always completely follow the trends in fifteenth and sixteenth-century vernacular debates, he was nonetheless very much in-tune with the issues we see in such documents. Beyond common sixteenth-century linguistic tropes—such as the arbitrary relationship between signifiers and signs and what exactly constitutes 'natural language'—Rabelais shows an astute interest in mother tongue, and in particular, mother tongue in relation to regional identity. Rabelais, although a fearsomely erudite polyglot, mocks those who use Latin with farcical episodes of "Latin skimmers" in his books, which I compare with Geofroy Tory's criticism of these characters in his *Champ fleury*. Via the character of the "Latin skimmer," moreover, I argue that in Rabelais' oeuvre there is an important albeit subtle partiality for the vernacular varieties of the Loire Valley and Ile-de-France. This is reflective not only of the fact that these were the regions in which he lived and worked most extensively, but Rabelais' preferences also echo tangible sociolinguistic trends in France in

the sixteenth century. Marginalized dialectal forms of the nether regions of France such as *limousin* are also marginalized in Rabelais' work, such as is the case with the poorly treated *écolier limousin*.

In examining Du Bellay's poetry, I illustrate how the author's ideas on the vernacular revolved from his days as the neophyte composer of the *Deffence* to that of a jaded poet in his *Regrets*. I study Du Bellay's vision of language in the *Deffence* with that of a contemporary antagonist, Barthélémy Aneau, in his *Quintil horatien*. Slated as a "counter-defense" to Du Bellay's treatise, Aneau argues in his *Quintil* that the French language is not as 'lacking' as his opponent paints it and that it needs no further embellishment through foreign imitation, as its strength lies in its historical, national, literary roots.

If we look at Du Bellay's attempts to illuminate the French language by creating an artificial linguistic history which jumps anachronistically back in time to foreign sources, we find that in his own literary work, such an approach will ultimately fail the author. Some of Du Bellay's most appealing poetry displays little foreign influence, but instead follows the currents of the very same native poetic predecessors that he aims to leave behind in his *Deffence*. This is a realization that Du Bellay himself comes to while composing his late work in Italy, the *Regrets*.

My discovery of Mathieu proved instrumental for my research on Montaigne's juristic understanding of the human responsibility for order in language. Both jurists, Mathieu and Montaigne argue for a conservative approach to language planning, and both see in uncontrolled linguistic evolution a threat to human communication. In my study, I examine how Montaigne's legal background causes him to hold a particularly strong stake in clear language, as well as a concern about the reliability of language within a given linguistic community.

Charles Bovelles—the other treatise writer I examine with Montaigne—may seem to be moving backwards with his idea of using Latin instead of the vernacular as a more permanent literary language, but we see this type of idea play out even near the end of the century with Montaigne, who, raised with Latin as his 'mother' tongue, continues to quote Latin texts profusely in his French essays, preferring to keep them in their 'native,' uncorrupted linguistic state rather than altering them through translation. Bovelles—the only French treatise writer I use in this study who refuses to compose in the vernacular!—clinches my understanding of Montaigne's linguistically conservative attitude, and further helps to elucidate the essayist's musings on the biblical story of Babel. Montaigne's ideas about the vernacular—while generally critically considered alongside those of his

Pléiade contemporaries—can be examined in a new light when studied in tandem with these lesser-known authors' works.

Because I examine largely historico-sociolinguistic problematics in these literary works, I study Rabelais, Du Bellay and Montaigne in their socio-historical context as much as possible, rather than rely heavily on modern theoretical interpretations. All three of these authors were working from their own theoretical perspectives, principally colored by Renaissance Humanism and the texts of Classical Antiquity, so rather than impose an anachronistic vision of the vernacular in their works as I form my conclusions, I minimize the examination of any modern or post-modern theory. Instead, by examining the prominent literary texts alongside the lesser-known treatises of the sixteenth century, I am allowed a chronologically and contextually more accurate picture of these vernacular anxieties which were so invasive in the early modern French psyche.

To commence, we must keep two major questions in mind. To begin with, what are the consequences (in language and literature) of applying an artificial, externally determined linguistic system to a living vernacular community? And, furthermore, what happens to semantics, and consequently, to human communication if such systems are implemented? While language treatises address problems of communication in the

vernacular, in sixteenth-century literature, authors such as Rabelais, Du Bellay, and Montaigne actively explore such problems via their own authorial use of the vernacular, as well as via their vernacular-speaking characters. In each of these authors' work, we perceive various types of communicative breakdown result from attempts to control the vernacular, as well as breakdown resulting from its inherent *uncontrollability*; my dissertation goal is thus to examine these ideas about 'manipulating' the vernacular in greater depth, as well as to try and elucidate how and why these theories fail when applied to more general themes of 'communication' in the literature of these three authors.

CHAPTER 1

COMMUNICATIVE QUERIES IN RABELAIS: SPEAKING 'NATURALLY,' REGIONAL DIALECT, AND THE ITALIAN QUESTIONE DELLA LINGUA CONTEXT

Introduction: Situating the Vernacular in Rabelais' oeuvre

Chez Rabelais, la langue française apparut dans une grandeur qu'elle n'a jamais eue, ni avant ni après. On l'a dit justement : ce que Dante avait fait pour l'italien, Rabelais l'a fait pour notre langue. Il en a employé et fondu tous les dialectes, les éléments de tout siècle et de toute province que lui donnait le Moyen Age....Un autre eût succombé à cette variété immense. Lui, il harmonise tout.²

In Rabelais, the French language appeared in a state of grandeur as never seen, either before or after. Someone put it quite rightly: what Dante did for Italian, Rabelais did for our language. He used and blended from it all of the dialects, elements from every century and from every province which

² Jules Michelet. *Histoire De France. 8, Réforme* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1855), 411.

the Middle Ages provided him....Any other [person] would have succumbed to this immense variety. He [Rabelais], he harmonizes everything.³

In her introduction to the current Pléiade edition of Rabelais' *Oeuvres complètes*, Mireille Huchon refers to the work as a “texte crypté....trompeur et évolutif”⁴ (cryptic text....deceptive and changing). She might well have used the same words to describe issues surrounding the French vernacular in Rabelais' books. As Jules Michelet notes in the above citation, in Rabelais, the French language reaches a state of ‘grandeur’ that it had never previously seen (and which it may not have seen since). Furthermore, as Barbara Bowen has noted, Rabelais' work may be the first piece of French literature “where characters actually talk to each other, rather than exchange monologues,”⁵ rendering it, thus, essential to examine language in his work not just in the context of linguistics, or literary style, but in the context of communication.

We may argue that language issues are tricky for any French writers working in the sixteenth century, as, indeed, the vernacular was still in very

³ This and all other translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

⁴ Francois Rabelais, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Edited by Mireille Huchon (Paris: Nouv. ed. Gallimard, 1994), XXX. All further Rabelais citations are from this edition unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ Barbara Bowen, *The Age of Bluff: Paradox & Ambiguity in Rabelais & Montaigne* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 577.

much a state of flux until Richelieu sanctioned its regularization with the *Académie Française* in 1635; but Rabelais makes language an even more apocryphal issue, playing with neologisms, *calembours*, and muddying the vernacular waters by sprinkling them with regional dialects. Furthermore, while the French of Montaigne and Du Bellay was very much *uni*-regionally influenced (Montaigne's by Gascony, Du Bellay's by the Loire Valley), Rabelais' constantly changing career path took him all over France, and his French language was influenced by the many dialects and patois that he encountered in Chinon, Montpellier, Lyons, Paris, and elsewhere.

Rabelais lived and wrote during a period of exciting change and valorization for the vernacular. To put the dates in context; *Pantagruel* was first published 1532, *Gargantua* in 1534, shortly following the publication of Geofroy Tory's *Champ fleury* and five years prior to the *Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts*, a legal decree which solidified the *de facto* practice of requiring all juridical documents to be composed in "*langue maternelle*," rather than in Latin. The *Tiers livre*, published in 1546, is also not-so-coincidentally Rabelais' work which deals the most directly with language issues; its publication arrives right in the middle of the French language debates revolving around the 'worth' of the French vernacular as a literary language, most famously represented by Joachim Du Bellay's *Deffence et illustration de la*

langue francoyse in 1549. The publication of the *Tiers livre* and the *Quart livre* (Chapters 1-11 in 1548; completed in 1552) furthermore immediately precede and even overlap the most fervent dispute over sixteenth-century spelling reform; in 1550 Louis Meigret and Jacques Peletier du Mans both take equally complex sides in this virulent debate touching phonetics and word origins, each side devising an equally complex orthographic system. Rabelais subtly marks his own preference by including, in his 1552 edition of the *Tiers livre*, the stipulation; « Reveu, et corrigé par l'Autheur, sus la censure antique. »⁶ Certainly, the historical sociolinguistic context in which Rabelais was working set the stage for language issues in his books.

Issues in language and communication in Rabelais' books have not escaped modern critics' attention, either. Entire critical volumes have been devoted to these issues, and language remains an important critical topic to explore today. However, the trends in researching language issues in Rabelais tend to gravitate towards either lexical studies (generally more quantitative⁷ than qualitative in nature), examinations of literary style⁸,

⁶ See Huchon, "Notice sur la langue de Rabelais," in *Œuvres complètes*, XXXVIII.

⁷ For a sampling of 'enumerative' quantitative examinations of Rabelais' language, see, for example : Christophe Clavel, « Rabelais et la créativité néologique : Quelques remarques sur l'absurdité d'un monstre linguistique, » *Études rabelaisiennes* 39 (2000): 59-85 ; Frederic Amory, "Rabelais' 'Hurricane Word-Formations' and 'Chaotic Enumerations': Lexis and Syntax," *Études Rabelaisiennes* 17 (1983): 61-74 ; and Marcel Tetel, "La Valeur Comique Des Accumulations Verbales Chez Rabelais," *Romanic Review* 53 (1962): 96-104.

⁸ See, in particular François Rigolot, *Les Langages De Rabelais* (Geneva: Droz, 1996).

parachronistic studies in Postmodern/Deconstructivist⁹ or other post-structuralist framework¹⁰, or examinations that focus on Rabelais' linguistic theories in tandem with historical precedents and/or those contemporary to sixteenth century audiences.¹¹

Because of the emphasis on Rabelais' relationship to the growth of the French language, it is imperative to reference the important modern philological work which has been completed on the topic of the lexical diversity of Rabelais' works. By far, the epitome of work on this topic is also the oldest. Lazare Sainéan's early twentieth-century *La langue de Rabelais*¹² explores the vast lexical sea that is Rabelais' oeuvre. While Sainéan's work seems overly systematic at times, enumerating the various influences on Rabelais' vocabulary from virtually every possible angle—religious, sociological, historical, dialectal and otherwise—it has proven invaluable to

⁹ For a deconstructive analysis, see Armine Kotin, "Pantagruel: Language vs Communication," *Modern Language Notes* 92, no. 4 (May, 1977): 691-709.

¹⁰ See, for example, Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "The Myth of the Sustainficque Mouelle: A Lacanian Perspective on Rabelais's Use of Language," *Literature and Psychology* 34, no. 3 (1988): 1–21. For another psychoanalytical (Freudian, not Lacanian) perspective on language in Rabelais, see Hope H. Glidden, "Childhood and the Vernacular in Rabelais' Gargantua," in *Lapidary Inscriptions: Renaissance Essays for Donald A. Stone, Jr.*, Edited by Barbara Bowen and Jerry C. Nash (Lexington: French Forum Pub, 1991), 183-194.

¹¹ For a comprehensive examination of early modern linguistic theories, see Marie-Luce Demonet, *Les voix du signe : Nature et origine du langage à La Renaissance, 1480-1580* (Paris: H. Champion, 1992).

For an examination of Rabelais' own linguistic ideas in the context of these theories, as well as, more specifically, in the context of his contemporary grammar-writers, see Huchon, *Rabelais Grammairien: De l'histoire du texte aux problèmes d'authenticité* (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1981).

For an analysis of Rabelais' views on language in a more classical context, in particular, that of Cratylism, see François Rigolot, «Cratylisme et Pantagruélisme: Rabelais et le statut du signe,» *Études Rabelaisiennes* 13 (1976):115-132 and Alice F. Berry, *Rabelais: Homo Logos*, North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures no. 208 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

¹² Lazare Sainéan, *La Langue De Rabelais* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1922).

the present study by sheer virtue of its encyclopedic, albeit not overly analytic-nature. Sainéan is the only critic to go beyond simple mention of the importance of regional dialect in the lexicography of Rabelais; he methodically examines each and every philological influence—from *basque* to *limousin*—on the vocabulary in Rabelais’ oeuvre.¹³

Sainéan’s work also puts forth an early *sociolinguistic* spin on studying language issues in Rabelais when he looks at the influence of popular culture—for example, in the form of proverbs and *dictons*, or specialized nautical jargons¹⁴—on Rabelais’ vocabulary. While for my own purposes of studying Rabelais’ use of the vernacular in the context of language treatises and debates, I will not be addressing those parts of Sainéan’s examination, it is important for recognizing the value of studying Rabelais’ language use in a sociolinguistic, rather than strictly literary, context. Despite the fact that he was an extremely *erudite* humanist writer—a point reflected in the vast sea of footnotes in modern critical editions of his works—he cultivated a language that reflected the *popular* culture he lived in. Before he was a writer, Rabelais

¹³ Other critics have addressed the influence of particular regional dialects and/or cultural traditions in sixteenth century France in Rabelais’ works, but none is as extensive and wide-ranging as Sainéan’s. See, for example, Marcel Laurent, *Rabelais : Le Monde paysan et le langage auvergnat* (Saint Laure, Clermont-Ferrand: Chez l’Auteur, 1971), and Michel Clément, « Le jargon des gueux chez Rabelais, » *La Langue de Rabelais, La Langue de Montaigne: Actes du Colloque de Rome, Septembre 2003* (Genève: Droz, 2009), 155-173.

¹⁴ Along these same lines, but in an *Acadian* rather than French context, see Antonine Maillet, *Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie*, Les Archives de Folklore, no. 13, Québec : Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1971.

was also a doctor and a monk, experiences that most certainly informed his work and his language. As such, any attempt at studying linguistic issues in his books must address the popular language and culture of *hoi polloi*, and not just that of the erudite, humanist, and/or evangelical elite.

This is not to say that no modern critics have paid attention to the historical socio-poly-linguistic context of the vernacular in Rabelais, but most have been too narrowly focused on enumerating lexical borrowings and/or neologisms rather than looking at the larger picture of language and communication in the books. While not specifically addressing Rabelais' books, one recent historical study will hopefully turn this trend in a new direction. In his study, *Courtly French, Learned Latin, and Peasant Patois: The Making of a National Language in Early modern France*,¹⁵ Paul Cohen examines how early modern language change was closely influenced by state formation as well as by other popular and political factors. In a move different from most strictly linguistic and/or literary examinations of language issues in early modern France, Cohen examines not only the literary documents—treatises, grammars, etc.—which accompanied vernacular debates, but also looks at “instances of ordinary language practice” by examining written artifacts such as administrative archives, court records, and literary works.

¹⁵ *Forthcoming*, Cornell University Press.

Furthermore, Cohen takes the critical step of examining early modern France in a *multi-lingual* context that takes into account the importance of regional dialects in the formation of a national language. Because around 1500, nearly nine-tenths of the peasant population in France spoke patois¹⁶, this is an important contribution to the history of the French language which is often glossed over. Cohen's examination of linguistic diversity in early modern France is thorough, and examines the socio-historic dimension of the vernacular in a manner which allows a fuller appreciation of the question at hand. I will rely broadly on his research for my own analysis of vernacular issues in Rabelais.

I will, however, extend Cohen's research in a slightly different direction by looking outside of immediate influences on Rabelais within France, and by looking more towards the influence coming from Italian *questione della lingua* documents. Because of his travels in Italy, keen interest in and understanding of Italian Renaissance humanist culture, beyond the French orthographical treatises that influence his composition of the third and fourth books, Rabelais was likely just as, if not more so, influenced by Italian *questione della lingua* authors and topics.

This is not the first time that potential links between Rabelais and

¹⁶ Alain Rey, Frédéric Duval, and Gilles Siouffi, *Mille Ans De Langue Française, Histoire D'une Passion* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 2007), 488.

Italy have been explored; Marcel Tetel devotes an entire volume to it in his *Rabelais et l'Italie*. However, Tetel, as well as those who broached the subject before him¹⁷, examine Rabelais' influence *in* Italy more than Italy's influence on his own works; furthermore, his research addresses a much wider concept of influence than mine, which focuses specifically on linguistic *questione della lingua* queries.

My curiosity with the Italian side of linguistic affairs in sixteenth-century France was piqued by Mireille Huchon's article in the recent volume of *Etudes rabelaisiennes* dedicated to the language of Rabelais and Montaigne. Huchon explores the potential influence of the earliest *questione della lingua* participant, Dante Alighieri, and poses the hypothesis that Rabelais was building upon the idea of a *lingua curiale* as presented in the medieval author's *De vulgari eloquentia*. My study will attempt to move beyond Huchon's relatively narrow comparison of Rabelais' language policies in light of Dante's vernacular vision of a *lingua curiale*.

Because I want to focus more on a chronological context closer to the time in which Rabelais was actually writing, I will also look at Machiavelli's *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua*, an often neglected treatise by a well-known sixteenth-century author. Critics such as Gary Ianziti have already

¹⁷ See, for example, Fernando Neri, "La dubbia fortuna del Rabelais in Italia." *Letteratura e leggende: raccolta promossa dagli antichi allievi con un ritratto e la bibliografia degli scritti del maestro* (Torino: Chiantore, 1951), 203-220.

suggested the potential influence of Niccolò Machiavelli's political thought on Rabelais; since language and politics were linked in early modern France—an idea I explore further in my chapter on Montaigne—it is logical to examine the relationship of Machiavelli's political ideas to his ideas about the vernacular and to compare them with those of Rabelais'. In his *Discorso*, Machiavelli—in much the same spirit of Barthelemy Aneau with Du Bellay—takes issue with Dante's ideas of a *lingua curiale*, and argues that linguistic diversity is an inevitable feature in an un-unified Italy. While arguing that diversity is inevitable, however, Machiavelli also effectively singles out Tuscan as the 'best' of all Italian dialects. I will compare Machiavelli's argument with Rabelais'—perhaps more subtle—singling out of *Tourangeau* and other Ile-de-France dialects in his four books. It may be argued that the language of Paris and its surrounding regions—in particular the Loire Valley—is considered as the dialect *par excellence* in sixteenth-century France. And, Rabelais, for one, embraces the dialectical diversity of his nation by ostensibly playing with all the different parlances in his works. But the question remains—is Rabelais' view of regional dialects more in line with what Dante proposes—a *lingua curiale* created from the best parts of all of French dialects, cultivated by the best poets and writers—or is it more in

line with what Machiavelli argues in his *Discorso*—that just as the standard for Italian is Florentine, the standard for French *should be* Tourangeau?

This multilingual approach will prove to be central to my examination of Rabelais. Keeping in mind the important contributions of studies such as Cohen's, which emphasize the dialectal diversity in sixteenth-century France as well the importance of the Italian *questione della lingua* debates—debates in which linguistic diversity was still a very central issue—I will examine how anxieties over vernacular communication in Rabelais' work take on perhaps a more polyvalent and multilingual context than what we see with later Renaissance authors such as Montaigne and Du Bellay.

The Unreliability of Language in Rabelais

One of the difficulties- but also one of the glories- of Rabelais is the diversity of his language. He invents monstrous words, adopts archaic spelling, deploys a richer vocabulary than any French writer before or since. Armed with this impressive but occasionally impenetrable linguistic equipment, he succeeds in conferring individuality on his characters solely through their speech, another technique practiced more often on the stage than on the page. *It is above all their words, their attempt to communicate or, more often, to impress that render Rabelais's characters laughable.*¹⁸

The above citation from Michael Heath's *Rabelais* opens this section because it points to an important factor in the current study. Unlike in Montaigne's *Essais* or Du Bellay's poetry, and unlike in any of the vernacular treatises dealt with in this chapter, language is not an abstract concept in Rabelais' work; it is a *living* system used and explored through conversation between the characters in the author's oeuvres. Rabelais does more than

¹⁸ Michael J. Heath, *Rabelais* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), 13, emphasis mine.

simply contemplate language theories; he puts them into action, ostensibly demonstrating and/or debating their legitimacy through acts of dialogue. As Heath and Bowen emphasize, Rabelais' having his characters talk to one another, rather than just exchange monologues about one topic or another—as was usual in French literature of the medieval period—tempts us to label him more rightfully as a *dramaturge* rather than as a *novelist*. But, more importantly, the conversational quality of Rabelais' oeuvre allows us to study the language of his characters in the context of early modern vernacular debates in a unique manner. Rabelais' characters speak to one another using various languages, and they even speak to one another about the nature of language, thus exploring linguistic theories by actively communicating them. One of the main linguistic queries in Rabelais' work, as well as in early modern treatises on language and the vernacular, is that of *speaking naturally*, as well as that of the arbitrariness of sign-signifier relationships.

Already in the first chapters of *Gargantua*, Rabelais opens with a question of vernacular importance. At the birth of the giant in chapter VI, after a complex description of the birthing 'trajectory', we read;

Soubdain qu'il fut né, ne cria comme les aultres enfans, « mies,

mies ». Mais à haulte voix s’escrioit, « à boire, à boire, à boire »,
comme invitant tout le monde à boire, si bien qu’il fut ouy de
tout le pays de Beusse et de Bibaroys.¹⁹

As soon as he was born, he didn’t cry like other children
« crumbs, crumbs²⁰». But he cried out loud, “drink, drink,
drink”, as if inviting everyone to take libations, so much so that
he was heard in the whole land of Beusse and Bibaroys.

As Huchon has noted, this inclusion probably refers to a popular mention in
sixteenth-century texts on language—the story of Psammeticus from the
second volume of Herodotus’ *Histories*, about ‘natural language.’ In the
original story, the exclamation of the word *becus*—“bread” in Phrygian—by
two children whom the Egyptian king, Psammeticus, ordered to be raised in
isolation by a shepherd, is used as proof that this language is the original
human tongue. Rabelais plays with this theme by having his baby *Gargantua*
cry for libations instead of crumbs.²¹ This is an important early insertion in

¹⁹ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 22.

²⁰ *Mie* is a difficult word to translate in English. Huchon suggests, and I agree, that Rabelais is using ‘bread’ as the basis of his wordplay here, but even in modern French, there is not one direct correspondence to English. Cotgrave’s 1611 dictionary gives as a definition, “the crumme, or pith of bread;” in modern French, the word is most often seen in “pain de mie,” for which “mie” is generally translated as “crust.”

²¹ The joke is that “boire” mimics the non-verbal howl of a crying baby. Adult listeners interpret the sound as the lexical unit “boire”—the verb “to drink” in French.

the oeuvre, because by scoffing at the Psammeticus myth, Rabelais establishes his mistrust of ‘natural’ language, pointing instead to his belief in the *arbitrary* nature of language.²²

This reference to the arbitrariness of language is repeated in the *Tiers livre*, when, in determining whether or not to seek out the counsel of a mute, Panurge recounts the story of Psammeticus. Pantagruel responds;

C’est abus dire que ayons language naturel. Les languagees sont par institutions arbitraires et convenences des peuples : les voix...ne signifient naturellement, mais à plaisir.²³

It’s a fallacy to say that we have a natural language. Languages are arbitrary by establishment and are a covenant of peoples: words do not signify naturally, but at will.

Beyond these explicit examples of what Rabelais says about the arbitrariness of language in his oeuvre, there are also a number of episodes which point to his mistrust of the sign-signifier relationship in human language. In chapters XVIII-XX of *Pantagruel*, for example, Rabelais

²² See Huchon’s note 1 in Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 1080.

²³ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 409.

explores arbitrariness in *extralinguistic* communication in the debate between Panurge and Thaumaste.

While traditionally viewed as a criticism of Scholastic debate procedures at the Sorbonne²⁴, the episode has much to offer in regards to Rabelais' view of the capriciousness of sign-signifier relationships.

Thaumaste, a learned man from England, comes to Paris with the express desire to meet Pantagruel, whose wisdom is spoken of even outside of France:

De faict, ouyant le bruyt de ton sçavoir tant inestimable, ay
delaissé pays parens et maison, et me suis icy transporté, rien ne
estimant la longueur du chemin, l'attediation de la mer, la
nouveaulté des contrées, par seulement te veoir, et conferer
avecques toy d'aulcuns passages de Philosophie, de Geomantie,
et de Caballe, desquelz je doubte et ne puis contenter mon
esprit, lesquelz si tu me peux souldre : je me rens dés à present
ton esclave moy et toute ma posterité : car aultre don ne ay que

²⁴ See Ruth Murphy, "Rabelais, Thaumaste and the King's Great Matter," *Studies in French Literature Presented to H. W. Lorton by Colleagues, Pupils, and Friends* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1968), 261-285.

Murphy, however, argues that this episode is based on a specific event: visits to the Sorbonne by learned Englishmen between 1529 and 1530 demanding debates on the matter of Henri VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon.

assez je estimasse pour la recompense.²⁵

In fact, hearing talk of your unequalled wisdom, I left my country, family, and home, and came here, thinking nothing of the length of the trip, the tediousness of the sea, nor strangeness of land, and came only to see you, and to confer with you about some passages in philosophy, in geomancy, and of the cabalist art, of which I am doubtful and cannot satisfy my mind. If you can resolve them, I render myself and my posterity your slave from now on; for there is nothing else I can offer you for so great a favor.

However, Thaumaste does not want to dispute with words—either spoken or written—but rather, proposes that he and Pantagruel engage in a debate through *gestures*;

Je ne veulx disputer *pro et contra*, comme font ces sotz sophistes de ceste ville et de ailleurs. Semblablement je ne veulx disputer en la manière des Academicques par declamation, ny aussi par

²⁵ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 282.

nombres comme faisoit Pythagoras, et comme voulut faire
Picus Mirandula a Romme.

Mais je veulx disputer par signes seulement sans parler : car les
matieres sont tant ardues, que les parolles humaines ne seroyent
suffisantes à les expliquer à mon plaisir.²⁶

I don't want to argue *pro et contra*, as do the sottish sophisters of
this town and elsewhere. Neither do I want to dispute in the
manner of the Academics by declamation, nor by numbers as
Pythagoras did, and as Picus della Mirandula wanted to do in
Rome.

But I want to dispute by signs only without speaking: because
the matters are so abstruse, hard, and arduous, that human
words will never be sufficient to explain them to my liking.

By taking out the socially-ordered parts of linguistic communication—things
like words, grammar, and syntax—Thaumaste argues that they will be able to
more effectively work at understanding these difficult issues of philosophy,
geomancy, and cabbala.

²⁶ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 282.

Pantagruel not only agrees to debate with Thaumaste, but also vigorously concurs to holding the debate outside of the restraints of the spoken word. He realizes that if they argue with gestures instead of words; no one in the audience will be able to ascertain the meaning of their ‘conversation’, and thus, won’t be able to hassle them in the common custom of Sorbonne debates:

Et loue grandement la maniere d’arguer que as proposée, c’est assavoir par signes sans parler : car ce faisant toy et moy nous entendrons : et serons hors de ces frapemens de mains, que font ces badaulx sophistes quand on argue : alors qu’on est au bon de l’argument.²⁷

And I greatly applaud the manner of arguing that you have proposed, that’s to say by signs without speaking: for in proceeding this way, you and I will understand each other, yet we’ll be free of this clapping of hands which these stupid sophists make when one of the debaters has gotten the better of the argument.

²⁷ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 283.

Although the debate is meant to be between Pantagruel and Thaumaste, and although Thaumaste has gone on at length about how he journeyed from England explicitly to be able to meet and converse with Pantagruel, in the end, it is Panurge with whom he debates. Panurge asks Thaumaste if he is debating with the goal of creating contention, or if he is seeking to know “the truth.” The English scholar responds that he doesn’t have any desire to “disputer par contention”²⁸ (dispute by creating contention) but will leave that ‘vile’ activity to the sophists. With this response, Panurge says that, in order not to embarrass his master with this matter, he will instead take his place in the debate as Pantagruel’s “disciple.”

The change in debate participants is already problematic because this is the first we’ve heard anything about Panurge being a “disciple” of Pantagruel. We must question how Panurge has gained the knowledge from Pantagruel necessary to partake in such a debate, considering that Pantagruel only made his acquaintance in chapter IX, and in the interim, while Pantagruel successfully resolves a dispute between Baisecul and Humevesne,²⁹ Panurge has managed to little more than tell dirty stories and play the ruse. There is little evidence that Pantagruel has passed on any of

²⁸ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 285.

²⁹ Chapters X-XIII.

his ‘renowned’ scavoir to his disciple, so we must already put into question the legitimacy of Panurge acting in his place in this deliberation.

The debate itself is unintelligible to everyone except the two participants, who partake in an exchange of grotesque—even obscene—bodily gestures. Poignantly, the only gesture the audience is able to understand is when Panurge pauses, juts out his chin, and gives a—apparently universally comprehensible—quizzical look at Thaumaste, as if to ask him, “Que voulez vous dire là?”³⁰ (What do you mean to say there?). The only message that has a collectively accepted meaning—both between the participants and the outside observers—is not really a message at all, but an expression of *not understanding*.

The entire debate comes to an end after Panurge makes a very ugly face at his opponent, pulling open his mouth with his fingers to show his teeth and pushing back his eyelids with his thumbs. To this gesture, Thaumaste declares him—and more importantly, Pantagruel through him—the victor, and claims that he has put to rest many of his doubts about the subjects for which he asked to discuss:

Vous avez veu, comment son seul disciple me a contenté et

³⁰ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 288.

m'en a plus dict que n'en demandoys, d'abundand m'a ouvert et ensemble solu d'aultres doubtes inestimables. En quoy je vous puisse asseurer qu'il m'a ouvert le vray puy et abisme de Encyclopedie, voire en une sorte que je ne pensoys trouver homme qui en sceust les premiers elemens seulement, c'est quand nous avons disputé par signes sans dire mot ny demy.³¹

You have seen how his [Pantagruel's] disciple only has satisfied me, and has told me more than I asked of him, as well as opened unto me and resolved other inestimable doubts. I assure you that he introduced me to the true well and abyss of the encyclopedia of learning, in such a way that I did not think I should ever have found a man that could have made his skill appear in so much as the first elements of that concerning which we disputed by signs, without speaking either word or half-word.

Through this debate of gestures, not only was Panurge apparently able to solve some of Thaumaste's most difficult questions about arduous

³¹ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 290.

subjects like philosophy and geomancy, but he was able to shed light on questions which Thaumaste *never even asked*, in a system of communication that is un-interpretable except by those who are communicating in it. Totally separated from the restraints of collective rules for communication within any socially determined linguistic system, Panurge and Thaumaste's signs can mean anything they want them to mean. However, Rabelais adds another level of illogicality to the scenario when he has Thaumaste declare that he will write down and make public the proceedings of the event so that other people can be privy to the wisdom of Pantagruel; this is repeated by Thaumaste two times, but we are left wondering how and what he will write, since as readers, all we were given to interpret was a series of obscene gestures that do not translate to any concrete meaning for us. The Thaumaste episode illustrates—perhaps more latently than any other episode on Rabelais oeuvre—that the sign signifier relationship is not only arbitrary, but can even be utterly ridiculous.

Another episode which deals with the idea of communicative interpretability and the arbitrariness of sign-signifier relationships is the meeting with the Sibyll of Panzoust in the *Tiers Livre*, chapters XVI-XVIII. The sibyl appears in the *Tiers Livre* as one of the sources of interpretation that Panurge seeks to discern his matrimonial destiny. She is actually the

first person with whom Panurge confers outside of his personal “boys’ club” posse. He agrees to consult with her after being unsatisfied with the response given by a Virgilian interpretation and a dream divination. Surprisingly, as misogynistic a character as Panurge has been in the first two books, at first, he is more than willing to seek advice from a woman, especially an old one:

Je (dist Panurge) me trouve fort bien du conseil des femmes, et mesmement des vieilles. A leur conseil je foyz tous jours une selle ou deux extraordinaires. Mon amy, ce sont vrays chiens de monstre, vrays rubriques de droict.³²

I, said Panurge, find myself very well off for women’s advice, and especially old women’s. On consulting them I always produce one or two extraordinary stools. My friend, they are real pointer dogs, real rubrics of the law books.

Panurge then continues to extol astute old women, speaking of their uncanny ability to foresee the future:

³² Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 401.

Et bien proprement parlent ceulx qui les appellent Sages
femmes. Ma coustume et mon style est les nommer Praesages
femmes. Sages sont elles : car dextrement elles congnoissent.
Mais je les nomme Praesages, car divinement elles praevoyent
et praedisent certainement toutes choses advenir....
Croyez que vieillesse feminine est toujours foisonnante en
qualité soubeline : je vouloys dire Sibylline.³³

And those people speak quite properly who call them sage
women. My custom and style is to call them presage women.
Sage they are: because adroitly they know. But I call them
presage, for they foresee divinely and foretell certainly things to
come....
Believe me, feminine old age is always abounding in zibeline
quality—I meant to say sibylline.

It is remarkable that Panurge goes this far to laud old women, as their
previous representations in the Rabelaisian corpus could be considered

³³ Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 401.

anything but flattering. In *Gargantua*, there are, in fact, no old women. The only women to make an appearance in the book are Gargantua's indeterminately-aged mother, Gargamelle, and the unnamed women who come to help her at her son's birth. Then, the mythical women of Thélème are specifically very young. In *Pantagruel*, conversely, old women do appear, but they're treated appallingly. For example, after telling a bawdy story in chapter XV about constructing walls around Paris made of, effectively, vaginas with penises inserted as 'support' beams, Panurge tells a perverse 'fable' about a fox and a lion who rape an old woman. Later on in the book, in chapter XXXI, Pantagruel, in a farcical 'peace offering,' marries the defeated, captured king, Anarche, to an old prostitute, who winds up beating her husband at the end of the story. Women in Rabelais can be old, but if they are old, they are generally ridiculed. Therefore, seeing Panurge openly and genuinely lauding specifically old women in the sibylline episode should already be inciting the reader to consider this case more carefully.

The Rabelaisian sibyl, upon first encounter, seems more an old witch of folkloric fashion than the dignified sibyls of mythology. In fact, Epistemon, the only character in Panurge's group to initially oppose seeking the sibyl, does so on the grounds that he thinks she might be a witch. And, indeed, when the sibyl appears in the piece, she doesn't seem to be the

incarnation of any brilliant “vieillesse” to which Panurge previously makes reference. Instead, she is described as quite a monstrous old hag:

La vieille estoit mal en poinct, mal vestue, mal nourrie, edentée,
chassieuse, courbassée, roupieuse, langoureuse, et faisoit un
potaige de choux verds avecques une couane de lar jausne et un
vieil savorados.³⁴

The old woman was ill-favored, ill-dressed, ill-nourished,
toothless, blear-eyed, hunchbacked, runny-nosed, languid, and
she was making a green cabbage soup with a rind of bacon and
some old broth from a soup bone.

The portrayal of our sibyl doesn’t get any better when she commences her divination process. During the ritual—which is quite complex, involving an intricate choreography of spinning spindle skeins around on the floor, putting coins in nutshells, sweeping around the fireplace hearth with a broom, and throwing a bundle of heather and bay leaf into the fire—the sibyl seems to go into a trance, mumbling and grunting in a foreign language:

³⁴ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 402.

Le consydera brusler en silence et veid que bruslant ne faisoit
grislement ne bruyt aulcun. Adoncques s’escria
espovantablement sonnant entre les dens quelques motz
barbares et d’estrangle terminaison...³⁵

She watched it burn in silence and saw that as it burned, it
made no sputtering or noise whatsoever. Thereupon, she gave
a frightful cry, muttering between her teeth a few barbarous
words with a strange ending...

Even though Panurge was not turned off or scared by the sight of the sibyl,
it is her incomprehensible language that ultimately makes him decide to flee.
It seems to be only when she starts babbling incoherently and using strange
body language during the divination process that he begins to worry so
much that he runs away before even receiving the results. We can note this
in the emphasis he places on these un-interpretable sounds in his objection:

Par la vertus Dieu, je tremble ! je croys que je suys charmé : elle

³⁵ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 403.

ne parle point Christian...Que signifie ce remument de
badigouinces ? Que pretend ceste jectigation des espaulles ? A
quelle fin fredonne elle des babines comme un Cinge
demembrant Escrevisses ? Les aureilles me cornent, il m'est
advis que je oy Proserpine bruyante : les Diables bien toust en
place sortiront...Dieu je meurs de paour !³⁶

By the power of God, I'm trembling! I think I'm under a
charm; she doesn't speak Christian....What's the meaning of
this movement of her chaps? What's the point of this
shrugging of her shoulders? To what purpose does she quaver
with her lips like a monkey dismembering crayfish? My ears are
ringing; it seems to me I hear Proserpina crying out; soon the
devils will come out on the spot. O what ugly beasts! Let's
get out of here! God, I'm dying of fear!

This stress on oral uncertainty is fascinating here, as speaking in
incomprehensible languages was considered in Renaissance witch trials as
one of the tell-tale signs of demonic possession. While the somewhat

³⁶ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 404.

repulsive and potentially terrifying image of the sibyl is concrete and intelligible, her language is not, and it is through the ambiguity of linguistic interpretation that Panurge loses his previous composure.

Even though Panurge renounced the sibyl earlier in this episode, he accepts her interpretation at the end, but as he will do with every single other interpretation given to him, he skews it to fit his own desires. Panurge manages to re-interpret her prophecy that he will be robbed, cuckolded, and skinned alive with a positive spin, to mean exactly the opposite. Once again, the reader questions the necessity of consulting all of these external sources of interpretations. By doing so, Panurge not only discredits the sibyl's authority in interpreting this event, but categorizes her language as untrustworthy. Because he can progress in no other direction with the sibyl's interpretation than the path he's already determined on his own, Panurge finds himself back at square-one, and leaves the sibyl to consult his next analyst—a mute.

To add insult to injury, when Pantagruel asks him if he'd rather consult a female or a male mute, Panurge chooses a male because, as he claims, women are only capable of understanding men in an erotic sense, and are conditioned to respond to men only in a sexualized manner. The linguistic signs that men produce—verbal, or non-verbal, as is this case with

the mute—are inherently more reliable than women’s because they are unsullied by sex. The sibyl’s words, already dismissed by Panurge as unreliable, now lose all credibility due to Panurge’s interpretation of her sexuality and thus, inherent carnally-motivated response.

As a woman, the sibyl is assumed to be inherently unpredictable; Panurge thus, despite the fact that her answer to his marriage request is essentially identical to those he receives from his male interpreters, negates her authority, and denies meaning to her speech. As he already knows what he wants to hear, he creates his own system of signifiers and signified from her words, finally arriving at his desired answer, and maintaining his position of power in the speech exchange. However, Rabelais still permits the sibyl to speak. In fact, at the beginning of the episode, Pantagruel puts oral communication at the forefront, and pushes his friends to listen to the sibyl by noting that “Nature” created humans with ‘open’ ears so as not to discriminate against any potential source of information; “affin que tous jours, toutes nuictz, continuellement, puissions ouy: et par ouye perpetuellement apprendre”³⁷ (so that so that every day, every night, we may be continually able to hear, and by hearing continually to learn...).

The problem with keeping open ears in the *Tiers Livre* is, of course,

³⁷ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 401.

that in order to learn, one must not only keep open ears, but also open minds, which is something that Panurge fails to do with the sibyl, or with any of the other sources of interpretation he consults. His incapacity to allow the sibyl's and other interpreters' words any meaning leaves him and his friends in linguistic limbo at the end of the book, sailing off to find another interminable destiny—that of the mythical Dive Bouteille.

Thaumaste's gesticular debate and Panurge's encounter with the Sibyl of Panzoust exemplify the arbitrariness of the sign-signifier relationship in Rabelais, but they also point to a more serious problem; the inherent *unpredictability* of language. If signs can mean anything the individual interpreter desires them to, what does this mean for linguistic systems which are necessarily determined by groups of people—systems such as societally-controlled vernaculars? In the next section, we will examine this problematic in the context of the vernacular as well as in that of 'natural language' as determined by Rabelais.

Panurge-ical polyglots, Regional dialects, and Speaking ‘naturally’

Despite what he says about the arbitrariness of language—or more explicitly, what he says about the arbitrariness between signifier and signified—Rabelais nonetheless does treat seriously the idea of *speaking naturally*. The superiority of nature over art is a common trope in early modern humanist texts dealing with language, but it is more commonly dealt with—especially in language treatises—in the contexts of *style* and *rhetoric*; in virtually all cases regarding language it is dealt with in the context of *writing*. In Rabelais, however, the context switches to one of *spoken* language. Furthermore, while he treats skeptically ‘natural’ signifier-signified relationships, he does provide some instances of ‘natural’ speech, which he correlates with ‘*langue maternelle*.’ I will argue that the mother tongue is intrinsically linked with regional identity in Rabelais, and that, despite his representation of the arbitrary nature of the sign-signifier relationship, Rabelais nonetheless establishes a not-so-arbitrary hierarchy of regional dialects influenced by his own regional bias towards the Loire region, which is more in line with what we see in the Italian *questione della lingua* than in French vernacular debates.

The episode which is most commonly isolated in the context of this

problematic is the *écolier limousin* episode in *Pantagruel* VI, but we will also examine it in the context of the first encounter with Panurge in *Pantagruel* IX, as well as a less-commonly studied incident in this context, the meeting of the dialectician, Janotus de Bragmardo, in *Gargantua* XVIII. Taken separately, each of these episodes provides some clues into Rabelais' vision of "natural" speech, but explored together, they also afford us an opportunity to understand this idea in the linguistic context of Rabelais' dialectally-diverse sixteenth-century world.

The *écolier limousin* episode³⁸ occurs in *Pantagruel* VI. Pantagruel and his companions, en route to Paris, come across a young schoolboy on his way to school one day. When the giant asks him where he's from and how he passes his time with other schoolboys in Paris, he formulates his response in a confusing, macaronic French that ultimately sends Pantagruel into a fury, and similarly to the episode of the sibyl, the schoolboy is accused of sorcery because Pantagruel cannot understand his language:

--Et bren bren dist Pantagruel, qu'est ce que vault dire, ce fol?

Je crois qu'il nous forge icy quelque langaige diabolique, et qu'il nous cherme comme enchanteur. » A quoy dist un de ces gens.

³⁸ For a thorough synopsis and early critical examination of this episode, see Raymond Lebègue, "L'écolier limousin," *Revue de cours et conférences* (May, 1939): 303-314.

« Seigneur sans doubte ce gallant veult contrefaire la langue des Parisians, mais il ne faict que escorcher le latin et cuide ainsi Pindariser, et luy semble bien qu'il est quelque grand orateur en François: par ce qu'il dedaigne l'usance commun de parler. »³⁹

--Well Shit, shit! said Pantagruel, what does he mean to say, this ninnie? I believe that he's creating here for us some sort of diabolical language, and that he's charming us like a sorcerer.” To which one of his men said, “Sir, without a doubt this gallant wants to imitate the Parisian tongue, but he does nothing but mispronounce Latin and presumes, thus, to Pindarize, and he well thinks himself some great orator in French because he disdains the common usage of speech.”

The *écolier* only worsens his situation when he responds again in his Latinized French, to Pantagruel's question of his origins. When he replies—again, in macaronic Latin—that his ancestors hailed from Limoges, and Pantagruel discovers his true regional identity, punishment ensues.

³⁹ Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 234.

--J'entens bien, dist Pantagruel. Tu es Lymosin, pour tout potaige. Et tu veulx icy contrefaire le Parisian. Or vien çza, que je te donne un tour de pigne. » Lors le print à la gorge, luy disant. « Tu escorche le latin, par saint Jan je te feray escorcher le renard ; car je te escorcheray tout vif. »⁴⁰

--I understand now, said Pantagruel. You are a *limousin*, when all comes t'all. And you pretend to speak Parisian here. Come here, then, so I can give you a lick with the comb." Then he took him by the throat, saying, "You're using inkhorn terms, by Saint Jean, I'll make you spew, for I'm going to skin you alive."

Pantagruel effectively frightens the young schoolboy into soiling himself, but finally speaking in his 'natural' tongue, the regionally appropriate *limousin* patois. Satisfied, the giant and his crew leave the boy alone with the final proclamation by Pantagruel, "A ceste heure parle tu naturellement" (Now you're speaking naturally).

There are two 'natural' languages which Rabelais labels as being violated in this episode. The schoolboy, who is educated in Paris, should

⁴⁰ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 234.

have the potential to use either *limousin* or the Parisian dialect in their unadulterated forms, but instead, he creates an unnatural sort of scholastic *barragouin*. For Pantagruel, it seemingly *should* have been acceptable had the boy answered in a pure form of either language, but since he mutilated the one with Latin, and was disloyal to his regional linguistic identity, *limousin*, the giant found it necessary to discipline him for his unfaithfulness.

Unsurprisingly, as the vernacular took hold as a literary language in early modern France and Italy, much of the debate on language revolved around whether or not the vernacular was ‘worthy’ enough to stand up to Latin. But I do not believe that this was a great concern for Rabelais; the fact that he elected to compose his entire oeuvre in French (peppered with instances of regional patois) is testament enough to his belief that the vernacular could hold its own as a literary language. Rabelais certainly could and did use Latin as his main epistolary language⁴¹, so his election of French for his five books is a significant defense of the vernacular in its own right. While the *écolier limousin* episode is traditionally viewed as a parody of scholastic jargon as well as a satire on the “ecorcheurs de latin” that is critiqued in France, most prominently by Geofroy Tory in his *Champ fleury*,⁴²

⁴¹ See, in particular, his letters to Guillaume Budé and Erasmus in Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 993-1000, both composed in Latin (with some sprinklings of Greek!).

⁴² See Huchon’s note 8, 1258 in *Oeuvres complètes* ; « L’ « ecorchure du latin » a été très tôt l’objet de critique. Dès la fin du XVe siècle apparaît l’Escumeur de latin ; il est un des cinq personnages de la Sottie nouvelle

I believe that it also dramatizes a multifaceted dynamic in any attempt to define ‘speaking naturally’, or indeed, determine what constitutes a worthy *langue maternelle* in Rabelais.

This episode is also noteworthy in that Rabelais is basing it upon an established tradition of *écumeurs*—but he gives the tradition a new spin. The trend to make fun of scholarly types who misuse and/or abuse the Latin language is nothing new in the sixteenth century. Indeed, the trend started much earlier in the twelfth century, and the theme can even be seen in the late medieval period with *fatrasies*—nonsensical and verbose poems with little linking the words within except rhyme. But probably much more relevant and familiar to Rabelais were the fifteenth-century *sotties* and farces such as “Maître Mymin” in which we see Latin ‘skimmers’ very much in line with Rabelais’ *limousin*.

As Raymond Lebègue and Gérard Defaux both note in their studies of this episode, parodies on ‘abusers’ of Latin were not by any means innovative in early modern France, as indeed, literature and popular documents of the sixteenth century reflect. But what is new is that Rabelais elected to give a regional identity to his *écolier* rather than make him an ‘all-purpose’ Latin counterfeiter. While Lebègue suggests that the election of

tresexcellent des coppieurs et lardeurs où sont dénoncés avant l’Infortuné, Fabri, Tory, et Rabelais, ceux qui disent : « Cavons de ramonner dispar/ Et immictes bien mes vestiges/ Et nous involvirent noz liges/ Pour les dissiper subit. »

specifically the *limousin* identity is purely inconsequential, merely playing off the tradition of the Limousine as “le type de lourdaud, du benêt epais....rustre qui ignore tout des raffinements de politesse”⁴³ (the type of blockhead....rustic who knows nothing of the refinements of civility),⁴⁴ I believe that it is important to note that Rabelais gave him *any* regional identity at all, as he could have easily built off of the traditional model of a generic Latin skimmer and still have elicited a comic effect. Instead, I would argue that the election of *limousin*—a dialectal form of the *langue d’oc*—is entirely intentional, as Rabelais was working within a subtle linguistic grading in sixteenth-century France where *francien* varieties of the *langue d’oïl* were gaining status as a prestige, and indeed, standard variety, and the royal court—in an move towards administrative centralization and linguistic standardization—was beginning to quell the power of regional dialects like *limousin*. To have a character like Pantagruel, who is established as using the *Tourangeau* dialect—a sibling dialect to Parisian French which is still considered under the larger umbrella of *langue d’oïl*⁴⁵—defile and defeat a

⁴³ *Revue des cours et des conférences*, 84.

⁴⁴ A poem by Clément Marot also points to an underlying negative stereotype for the Limousine regional identity. See his Epître CCLXXVII- “D’un Limosin:” « C’est grand cas que nostre voisin / Tousiours quelque besongne entame / Dont ne peut, ce gros Limosin, / Sortir qu’à sa honte & diffame. / Au reste, je croy, sur mon ame, / Tant il est lourd & endormy, / Que quand il besongne sa femme / Il ne luy fait rien qu’à demy. »

⁴⁵ On the linguistic map of modern-day *langues d’oïl*, Touraine is grouped in as a variety of the dialect of the Ile-de-France, i.e. Paris, along with Orléanais, western Champenois, Berrichon, and Bourbonnais. All of these make up the *zone francienne*.

character using a marginalized dialect like *limousin* is not an indiscriminate inclusion. Here, Rabelais is slowly developing his preference for the dominant, centralized French ‘standard,’ and mocking the marginalized patois which are losing status in the country’s extreme poles.

In order to test this hypothesis, we must now try to situate the *écolier* scene in a larger Rabelaisian perspective. Another episode in *Pantagruel* that plays with the idea of what constitutes “natural language” within a multilingual context is that of the first meeting with Panurge in chapter IX. Very much in the same way as Pantagruel and his band ‘come across’ the *écolier limousin* in their travels, they happen upon Panurge one day while ‘promenading’ outside of town.

Panurge is given the description of a man who has fallen on hard times. He is labeled as:

...un homme beau de stature et elegant en tous lineamens du corps, mais pitoyablement navré en divers lieux : et tant mal en ordre qu’il sembloit estre eschapé es chiens, ou mieulx ressembloit un cueilleur de pommes du pais du Perche.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 246.

...an imposing figure, tall, and with fine features, but piteously afflicted in several parts: so badly put together that he seemed to have escaped from some dogs, as he best looked like an apple-picker from the land of Perche.

Seemingly based on nothing more than his dejected appearance, Pantagruel immediately takes pity on Panurge, and decides to ask him who he is, where he's coming from, where he is going, and what his name is. Instead of answering the question directly in French, Panurge responds in no less than a dozen different tongues⁴⁷, some of which are *barragouins* of Rabelais' own invention; moreover, he doesn't entirely respond to the questions posed of him, but instead, answers with variations on a theme of asking the giant to have pity on him and his appetite. Finally, after exchanging words in *utopian*, which Pantagruel recognizes, but cannot speak, the giant asks Panurge if he can speak French, to which the rogue replies:

-Si faictz tresbien seigneur....Dieu mercy: c'est ma langue

naturelle, et maternelle, car je suis né et ay esté nourry au jardin

⁴⁷ In the Pléiade edition used for this present study, these are; 1. German (literary, not vernacular, and peppered with Latinisms and archaisms), 2. An invented language, 3. Italian, 4. Scottish (added to the 1542 edition), 5. Basque (added to the 1542 edition), 6. An invented language, 7. Dutch, 8. Spanish, 9. Danish (added to the 1534 edition), 10. Hebrew, 11. Ancient Greek transcribed phonetically, 12. An invented language, 13. Utopian (also invented), and, 14. Latin.

de France, c'est Touraine.

-Yes I do so very well sire.....Thank God : it's my natural and maternal tongue, as I was born and raised in the garden of France, that is, Touraine.

Curiously, despite the fact that he has just met Panurge, and despite the violence that the Limousine schoolboy met upon revealing his true linguistic identity, Pantagruel expresses his feelings of great friendship for the stranger, and vows that they will never leave each other's side.

Now, why does Pantagruel treat Panurge so kindly after this multilingual funny business when he was previously so cruel to the *limousin* schoolboy? The explanation, I would argue, is two-fold. First of all, with the *écolier limousin* episode, I believe Rabelais is indeed, as other critics have argued, directly parodying critiques by Geofroy Tory and others of *écumeurs de latin*.

But while we can only conjecture that Rabelais was influenced by the farcical tradition of the *écumeur*, Rabelais is very clearly building off of Tory, whom he cites directly. Much of the *écolier's* dialogue openly mimics that of Tory's *Champfleury*. Tory singles out *écumeurs* along with verbal pranksters

(“plaisanteurs”) and ‘jargoners’ (“jargonneurs”) as those who pose the greatest threat to the vernacular. He says of them:

Quāt Escumeurs de Latin disent Despumon la verbocination
latiale, & transfreton la Sequane au dilucule & crepuscule, puis
deābulon par les Quadriuies & Platees de Lutece, & comme
verisimiles amorabundes captiuon la beniuolence de lomnigene
& omniforme sexe feminin, me semble quilz ne se moucquent
seullement de leurs semblables, mais de leur mesme Personne.⁴⁸

When these Latin counterfeiterers say they despumate the Latial
verbocination, and transfretate the Sequane at the Dilicule and
Crepuscule, then deambulate by Lucrecius’ Quadrivites and
Platites of Lutece [the ancient Roman meme for Paris], and as
verisimilarly amorabons, captivate the benevolence of the
omnijugal and omniforme feminine sex, it seems to me that
they they are not only making fun of their peers, but of
themselves.

⁴⁸ Geofroy, Tory. *Champ Fleury* (Octavo Editions: Paris, 1929), CD-Rom.

We must compare this citation with Rabelais' schoolboy's reply when asked what his daily life at school looks like:

Nous transfretons la Sequane au dilicule, et crepuscule, nous
deambulons par les compites et quadriviers de l'urbe, nous
despumons la verbocination Latiale, et comme versimiles
amorabonds, captons la benevolence de l'omnijuge, omniforme
et omnigene sexe feminine...⁴⁹

We transfretate the Sequan at the dilucul and crepuscul; we
deambulate by the compites and quadrives of the urb; we
despumate the Latial verbocination; and, like verisimilary
amorabons, we captat the benevolence of the omnijugal,
omniform and omnigenal feminine sex.

With only a few slight lexical alterations and word-order changes from the original, Rabelais' discourse is an obvious parody of Tory's. However, these similarities do not explain why it is that this particular *écolier* meets with such an exceedingly violent punishment in comparison to the pronounced

⁴⁹ Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 232-233.

kindness, and even friendship that Panurge receives for his linguistic performance. There are other examples of *écumeurs* in Rabelais' oeuvre who are not treated so badly: a pointedly similar episode in terms of language use and abuse is that of the dialectician, Janotus de Bragmardo, in *Gargantua* XVIII. We meet Janotus in Paris just after Gargantua effectively steals the bells from the tower of Notre Dame—he takes them home to put around his pony's neck, but then decides that he doesn't really want them, so he leaves them there. The people of Paris are fairly injured by this action, and, after a period of debate, decide to ask Janotus—their 'oldest and most habile' scholar—to use his rhetorical skills to get their bells back.

We are keyed in to the fact that Janotus is a ridiculous character by his physical description alone. He has a bowl haircut, is dressed in an old-fashioned hooded scholar's cloak, and is described as having taken quite copious libations of the alcoholic variety before meeting with Gargantua. He slogs along with him a posse of equally drunken Sorbonne masters, bedraggled in their scholarly robes. Upon seeing this parade of characters, Ponocrates at first confuses them for some sort of masquerade, but upon asking the purpose of their visit, runs to find Gargantua.

Janotus' silliness is confirmed when he sets upon his argument to as to why Gargantua should give the city of Paris back its bells. His discourse

is notably activated by an onomatopoeic “Ehen, hen hen,” clearing of his throat and “Hen, hen hasch”⁵⁰ coughing, which should already be enough to send readers laughing. But Janotus’ arguments are ridiculous; he consistently reaffirms that Gargantua should give the bells back, but never gives any plausibly linked reason why. Perhaps the peak moment of the parody comes when Janotus gives this syllogistically formed reasoning:

Ego sic argumentor.

Omnis cloche clochabilis in clocherio clochando clochans
clochatiuo clochare facit clochabilier clochantes. Parisius habet
clochas. Ergo gluc (52).

Thus I argue in this way.

Each bellable bell to be belled in the belfry, belling by the
bellative, bells bellfully the bells. Paris has bells. Therefore,
Gluc.⁵¹

Not only is Janotus’ syllogistic reasoning preposterous, but so is his language. He interjects colloquial French sayings and proverbs with

⁵⁰ Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 51.

⁵¹ As Huchon notes in her annotation to this episode, “Ergo gluc” is just a terminology designating a conclusion which is *not* one. Ibid, note 6, p. 1111.

scholastic Latin jargon that is out of context, and thus, irrelevant to the discourse as a whole. Unlike the *limousin* school boy, who—although speaking in a bastardized, macaronic Latin—was quite straightforwardly describing a typical day at school with his friends, Janotus—whose Latin is, while out of context, mostly proper—doesn't really reach any coherent conclusions at all with his hacking, wheezing *radotage*. In the end, not only do Gargantua and his posse break out laughing at him, but Janotus himself joins in the laughter at his own expense!

Why is the outcome of this *écumeur's* story so different from the *limousin's*? First, we need to consider Janotus' mis-use of Latin in a different context than the school boy's. Janotus' episode is set in a series of chapters, starting with the introduction of Eudemon in Chapter XV, concerning the medieval scholastic tradition versus the new, humanist style of learning. Gargantua and his crew arrive in Paris with the intention of finding out about the new vogue of learning there. Janotus is strictly linked with the old style—from his old-fashioned robes to his hacking voice, everything about him is outmoded and must be made fun of accordingly.

But there are other representatives of the old, scholastic learning style in Rabelais' oeuvres; more important to Janotus' case is his language. As Alan Perriah notes:

One of the most remarkable features of Scholastic texts, and one which the Humanists never cease to mention, is the peculiar language in which they are expressed....

Scholastic dialectic requires a vocabulary expressly tailored to its own needs and purposes. Like its present-day counterparts, however, it often borrows words from the principal language which it studies.....But the words borrowed from this so-called “object language” hardly ever retain the meanings they have in normal use. This separate vocabulary along with its own syntax constitutes a self-contained “language used for linguistic analysis. Hence Scholastic dialectic is not a corrupted form of ordinary language because it is not a form of ordinary language to begin with.⁵²

This “metalanguage”—to borrow Perriah’s terminology—that Janotus performs certainly is no ordinary language, nor is it a *corruption* of any ordinary language, as is the *limousin*’s. Even the perfectly proper Latin sayings that pepper his speech lose their original meaning in his discourse

⁵² “Humanistic Critiques of Scholastic Dialectic,” *The Sixteenth century Journal* 13.3 (1982):13.

when they are taken so wholly out of context. His scholastic language is not just inappropriate, but entirely unconventional, and as such, it cannot conform to the standards of natural language which Rabelais sets up for the school boy and Panurge.

Since with the example of Janotus, we have eliminated the argument that the *écolier limousin* episode is simply repeating the commonplace ridicule of *écumeurs*, we are left with the question: why are Panurge and the school boy not treated equally? Contrary to what Saulnier and others maintain, I would put forth the argument that Rabelais is not just repeating a conventional stereotype of the *limousin* as stupid and ‘rustic,’ but rather, that he is exposing a preference—not necessarily of his own creation, but one reflective of the society in which he lived—of what he deems the ‘best’ dialects, or rather, the best ways of “speaking naturally.”

We must now consider the sociolinguistic climate in which Rabelais composed his schoolboy episode. As Cohen and other scholars of the period have noted, early modern France was a vibrantly *multilingual* space, and with the majority of the population living in rural, agricultural areas, regional dialect (e.g. patois) were very important to the linguistic landscape. As Rabelais lived and wrote in a transitional period, we must also consider the linguistic make-up of late-medieval France, which had just as, if not

more, of a complicated linguistic make-up as the later, post-Villers-Cotterêts nation. And Rabelais not only embraced the linguistic diversity of early sixteenth-century France, but he made it an integral element of his oeuvre. As Saulnier notes:

Les termes régionaux constituent chez Rabelais une mine d'une richesse incomparable. Toutes les provinces de France, de la Normandie à la Provence, y sont représentées par des vocables caractéristiques. Ces mots de terroir, qui nous découvrent des coins ignorés de la vie provinciale du passé, ont été recueillis par notre auteur pendant toute sa vie d'écrivain. Depuis ses années de moinage à Fontenay-le-Comte, en Poitou, jusqu'à son séjour en Provence dans son âge mur, il n'a cessé d'accroître cette moisson dialectale, peut-être la partie la plus foncièrement originale de son œuvre.⁵³

In Rabelais, regional terminology constitutes an incomparable source of [lexical] richness. All of France's provinces, from Normandy to Provence, are represented there [in his books] by

⁵³ Verdun-Louis Saulnier, *Le Dessein De Rabelais* (Paris: Société d'Édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1957), 132.

typical terms. These regionalisms, which are unveiled to us from the unknown corners of past provincial daily life, were gathered by our author during his entire life as a writer. Since his monastic days in Fontenay-le-Compte in Poitou, to his stay in Provence in his later years, he never ceased to heighten this dialectal harvest, perhaps the most fundamentally original part of his work.

Keeping this idea of the key position of dialectal diversity to Rabelais' work, we must now consider some of the historico-linguistic particularities of early sixteenth-century France.

As R. Anthony Lodge notes in his *French: from dialect to standard*, there exists “no real evidence to demonstrate that a single spoken standard had been ‘selected’ in France before the end of the twelfth century,”⁵⁴ and it was only later in the thirteenth century that there was a net distinction between the *langue d’oc* in the South, and the *langue d’oïl* in the North, as evidenced in Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia*:

All the rest of Europe that was not dominated by these two

⁵⁴ R. Anthony Lodge, *French, from Dialect to Standard* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 98.

vernaculars was held by a third, although nowadays this itself seems to be divided in three: from some now say *oc*, some *oil*, and some *sz*, when they answer in the affirmative; and these are the Hispanic, the French, and the Italians. Yet the sign that the vernaculars of these three people derive from one and the same language is plainly apparent: for they can be seen to use the same words to signify many things, such as ‘God’, ‘heaven’, ‘love’, ‘sea,’ ‘earth’, ‘is’, ‘lives’, ‘dies’, ‘loves’, and almost all others. Of these peoples those who say *oc* live in the western part of southern Europe, beginning from the boundaries of the Genoese. Those who say *sz*, however, live to the east of those boundaries, all the way to that outcrop of Italy from which the gulf of the Adriatic begins, and in Sicily. But those who say *oil* live somewhat to the north of these others, for to the east they have the Germans, on the west and north they are hemmed by the English sea and by the mountains of Aragon, and to the south they are enclosed by the people of Provence and the slopes of the Apennines.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *Dante: De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Translated by Steven Botterill (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17, 19.

For sixteenth-century France, the *oc* and *oïl* distinction still held true, creating a linguistic demarcation between the North and South; in modern geographical terms, a line drawn on a map between Grenoble and Bordeaux gives a good idea of the geographical boundary between the two language families, with *oïl* above the line, *oc* below.

There is ample evidence from the late medieval period that the centralized dialect of the Loire Valley—the ‘king’s French’—is the superior dialectal form in northern France;⁵⁶ by the thirteenth century, as Lodge notes, in works such as Roger Bacon’s *Compendium studii philosophiae*, references to the Parisian dialect as “*puros*” (“pure”) point to evidence that the language spoken in the region around Paris was considered by many to be a “standard” dialectal form in France by the thirteenth century.

As the power of the King was extended beyond the Ile-de-France in the thirteenth century, so his language set the norms among influential people in the subjugated provinces. *Francois* gradually ceased to be the name for the dialect of the Ile-de-France as the King’s French became the administrative

⁵⁶ See Lodge, *French: From Dialect to Standard*, 98-99.

language of a vastly extended kingdom.⁵⁷

Furthermore, as Danielle Trudeau and others have remarked, we see evidence from the thirteenth century onward of authors born in *province* excusing themselves for their substandard accents, lexical peculiarities, etc.; at the same time, authors from Touraine and Paris pride themselves on their linguistic roots. A classic example from the early sixteenth century can be found in the poetry of Clément Marot. A court poet, Marot left his native Quercy, a former province in the southwest of France, for the migratory Valois court when he was ten years old. He documents the linguistic changes he faced in his *Enfer*:

A brief parler, c'est Cahors en Quercy,
Que je laissay pour venir querre icy
Mille malheurs, ausquels ma destinée
M'avoit soumis. Car une matinée
N'ayant dix ans en France fuz meiné:
Là où depuis me suis tant pourmeiné
Que j'oublaiy ma langue maternelle,

⁵⁷ Lodge, *French: From Dialect to Standard*, 101. For more on this same subject, see also Danielle Trudeau, *Les inventeurs du bon usage, 1529-1647* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1992), 16.

Et grossement aprins la paternelle,
Langue françoise, ès grands courts estimée,
Laquelle en fin quelque peu s'est limée,
Suyvant le roy François premier du nom,
Dont le sçavoir excède le renom.

To be brief, it was the town of Cahors in Quercy
Which I left to fetch here
A million misfortunes here, to which my destiny
Had subjected me. Because one morning,
Not being yet ten years old, I was taken to France:
There, where I have since so devoted myself,
That I lost my mother tongue,
And rudely learned the father one.
The French language, so esteemed in the grand courts,
That which in the end has polished itself very little,
Following King Francis, the first of that name,
Of whom the knowledge exceeds the renown.

In the sixteenth century, some writers of grammars claim Paris to be the

place where the “purest” and “best” dialect is spoken in France. In his *Eclaircissement de la langue françoise*, the Englishman, Jehan Palsgrave, admits to mainly following the Parisian dialect in composing his guide to pronunciation, even if he dislikes the pronunciation of certain phonemes, such as the “R”:

...where as they of Parys sounde somtyme *r* lyke *ʀ*, saying *pazy*s for *parys*, *pazisien* for *parisien*, *chai*ʀe for *chayre*, *ma*ʀy for *mary* and *suche* lyke, in that thing I wolde nat have them followed, albeit that in all this worke I moost folowe the Parisyens and the countreys that be conteygned between the river of Seyne and the river of Loyrre, which the Royayns called comtyme Gallya Celtica: for within that space is contained the herte of Fraunce, where the tonge is at this day moost parfyte, and hath of moost auntyente so continued⁵⁸.

Palsgrave goes on to say that he sees it unnecessary to go into detail about the pronunciations of other regional dialectal varieties, as anyone who writes as they speak in Paris will have no trouble making himself understood in any

⁵⁸ Jean Palsgrave, *L'éclaircissement De La Langue Française. Suivi De La Grammaire* ([Reprod.]) / Par Jean Palsgrave (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1852). 34.

part of France. But Palsgrave's election of Parisian French as the dialect *par excellence* for his dictionary was likely based on the fact that Paris was conveniently located for commerce with England. In French grammars, while Paris occasionally comes up as an outstanding locale, little preference is given by French author's to the Parisian melting-pot of a dialect; instead, they looked towards the Loire Valley, or as Palsgrave specifies, "the countreys that be conteygned between the river of Seyne and the river of Loyrre," to find the 'purest' form of French to emulate.

In the south of France, however, the dialectal situation is quite unlike that of the standardizing north. Enriched by a long troubadour tradition, Occitan continued to be used not only in daily, oral conversation, but was also used in its written form—including in administrative, departmental documents—well into the fifteenth century. In fact, as Henriette Walters notes in a not-so-insignificant detail to this present study, while the *Limousin* region in general was early to 'se franciser,' the city of Limoges itself was resistant to switch to French until the late fifteenth century.⁵⁹

Now, considering that Rabelais first published *Pantagruel* in 1532, he would have been writing it in a plurilinguistic society in which regional dialects were still the norm (and would remain the norm until the

⁵⁹ Henriette Walter, *Le Français d'ici, de là, de là-bas* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2000), 102.

Napoleonic reforms), and in which, while Latin had already lost prestige, as a language of legal documentation, Parisian French was slowly working its way into the category of the prestige, dialectal standard.

When Panurge resorts to using this prestige dialect, he is greeted with friendliness, but the *limousin* schoolboy continues to be punished for his contaminated and *non*-standard dialectal usage. Very significantly, Rabelais has Pantagruel criticize the boy for counterfeiting “Parisian,” thus giving prestige status to the Ile de France variety. Could Rabelais thus not only be criticizing the *limousin* for his counterfeit, overly-Latinized French, but also, more specifically, making fun of his regional identity as inferior to the Parisian standard?

This is, however, too simplistic of a reduction to apply to Rabelais’ dialectal preferences in general in his books. As Sainéan notes, Rabelais’ French was of the Parisian variety at its core⁶⁰, but being born in *Touraine*, he also gives a high ranking to the dialects of Western France. In fact, as Sainéan points out, the majority of regional lexemes in Rabelais’ work come from Saintonge, Touraine, Maine, Anjou and Poitou—the regions that he was most familiar with because of his time spent living and working there, but also the regions most representative of the *francien* standard. Panurge has

⁶⁰ *La langue de Rabelais*, 145.

already revealed his *Tourangeau* identity in *Pantagruel*, but he further reiterates it to the soldiers guarding the entry into the Realm of the *Quinte Essence* in Chapter XVIII of the *Cinquiesme livre*. Upon being asked from where he came, Panurge replies that he and his companions are “*Tourangeaux*,” after a brief moment of confusion over the pronunciation of the toponym Entelechie, Panurge excuses “la rusticité” of his language, to which the soldiers reply:

Sans cause.....Car grand nombre d’autres ont icy passé de vostre païs de Touraine, lesquels nous sembloient bons lourdaux et parloient correct....⁶¹

No worries....For a great number of others have come here from your land of Touraine, who seemed to us good lobs and they speak correctly....

Touraine is here given a prestige status in comparison to other dialects spoken by visitors to the *Dive Bouteille*; it is in Touraine, *le jardin de la France*, where people speak correctly, and where they speak the ‘best’ French dialect.

⁶¹ Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 766.

Furthermore, in another significant detail from the *Cinquiesme livre*, the Dive Bouteille turns out to be located in Touraine; much is made of the city of Chinon in Chapter XXXIII. The city's renown is even emphasized with the inclusion of its *dévis*:

deux, ou trois fois, Chinon,
petite ville grand renom,
assise sus pierre ancienne,
au haut le bois, au pied Vienne.⁶²

two, or three times, Chinon,
little city, great renown,
set on ancient stone,
above, the forest, below, Vienne.

While we don't know much about the particularities of *Tourangeau* dialecticisms in Rabelais' time,⁶³ this is not entirely necessary knowledge for the present study; what is important is that the *Tourangeau* dialect can rightly

⁶² Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 810.

⁶³ See Sainéan, *La langue de Rabelais*, 156 : « Les patois de l'Ouest occupent une place prépondérante dans l'ensemble des sources dialectales de Rabelais. C'est dans cette aire que figure son pays natal, la Touraine, dont le patois nous est malheureusement le moins connu du groupe. Le tourangeau est, en effet, jusqu'ici resté la *terra incognita* de la dialectologie française. Pour atténuer les inconvénients de cette lacune capitale, nous allons étudier les autres patois congénères et aborder en dernier lieu le tourangeau. »

be linked together with Parisian as part of the greater *francien*, *langue d'oïl* variety, and there is ample evidence in Rabelais pointing to his preference for this language group over any other, be it through sheer inventory, or through specific reference to the primacy of the variety. While Sainéan lists *languedocien* as a significant regional source for Rabelais' lexicon, and while he mentions another Occitan dialect—*gascon*—as generally used for comic effect,⁶⁴ the only episode— a substantial one, at that— that we have to base an understanding of the author's opinion of *langue d'oc* varieties is that of the *écolier limousin*, and it is inherently negative. As a speaker of the normative dialect reflecting societal stereotypes in his work, Rabelais creates a bias against what he considers a laughably inferior form, creating a dialectal partiality via characters such as the polyglottal Panurge and Latin-skimming *écolier*. While the election of a *tourangeau* identity for Panurge and *limousin* for the *écolier* have been consistently passed over by scholars of Rabelais as inconsequential details, I would argue that these are significant, albeit understated inclusions, as they reflect sociolinguistic realities inherent in Rabelais' France, and point to a subtle predisposition on the part of the author regarding regional dialects.

⁶⁴ *La langue de Rabelais*, 193.

***Regional dialect in French treatises and
Italian questione della lingua documents***

Curiously, French treatises on the vernacular rarely create linguistic preferences such as the ones we see in Rabelais, pitting *francien*, *langue d’oc* varieties against *langue d’oil* dialects. In fact, as Trudeau remarks in her *Inventeurs du bon usage*, mid-to-late-sixteenth-century French grammar and treatise writers tend to stray from societal pressures to label Parisian as the superior standard.⁶⁵ Mention of Paris in French treatises usually points to the societal stereotype as a wrongly formed one, and much more emphasis is put on the acceptance of dialectal diversity than on the election of a standard.

In fact, if we look at a sampling of French grammars from the early sixteenth century, while they all aim for some sort of ‘standardization’ of the French language through the elucidation of grammar and orthographic and lexical rules, very little attention is given to any dialectal ‘norm’ for all of France. In fact, with all the laudations Tory accords the city of Paris, he criticizes its people’s bad pronunciation nearly as much as he does other dialectal regions of France. Charles Bovelles’ (“Carolus Bovillus”) 1533 *Liber*

⁶⁵See page 16 : « les « grammariens » semblent sourds à la pression sociale, ils ne se font pas les porte-parole de la norme spontanée, refusant d’associer la qualité de la langue au prestige social. »

de differentia vulgarium linguarum et gallici sermonis varietate (“On vernacular tongues, and the variety of the French language”), argues that the vast variety of dialects in France created a linguistic situation in which any attempts at unification and/or standardization would be futile; no vernacular dialect should be deemed superior to any others, as they *all* were inferior to Latin. And as Trudeau notes, even in the anatomist Jacques DuBois’ (“Jacobus Sylvius”) *In linguam gallicum Isagôge, una cum eisdem Grammatica latino-gallica, ex hebraeis, graecis & latinis authoribus* (“Introduction to the French language, with a Latin-French grammar of the same, based on Hebrew, Greek and Latin authors”), there is no preference given to Parisian or other *francien* dialects; in fact, his tendency is to label his own *picard* dialect as closer to Latin, and thus, superior to other forms.⁶⁶

However, we do see tendencies to create linguistic hierarchies of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ dialects in documents from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian *Questione della lingua*, a debate in which the question over the superiority of one dialect—Florentine—was at the forefront. As Robert A.

⁶⁶ See Trudeau, *Les inventeurs du bon usage*, 32 : « Ni la langue des Parisiens, ni celle de la cour ou des écrivains ne représentent pour Sylvius la « pureté antique » du français. Par contre, le dialecte picard- sa langue maternelle-, le normand, et, dans une moindre mesure, le provençal sont présentés comme des parlers mieux conservés. Ils attestent pour lui des strates plus anciennes de la langue vulgaire, que rend visibles la disposition même du commentaire sur la page : dans les exemples de l’Isagôgè, la prononciation picarde se trouve intercalée entre la prononciation latine et celle des Galli. Cette disposition de la matière sur la page invite le lecteur à juger- et à jauger- la proximité respective des ensembles « picard » et « galli » par rapport au latin. »

Hall, Jr.⁶⁷ and others note in their studies of these debates in Italy, even though the debates eventually branched off into questions of archaism/novelty, orthographic reform, and the influence of foreign languages (particularly French) on the Italian language, the earliest participants in the *questione della lingua* were mainly concerned with establishing Florentine as a prestige dialect to serve as the basis for an Italian dialectal standard.

In his *De vulgari eloquentia*, the earliest and most important document for the *questione della lingua* debate, Dante sets upon the mission to find a worthy variety “amid the cacophony of the many varieties of Italian speech”⁶⁸ for his illustrious vernacular. Along the way, he eliminates many regional dialects as potential models for the vernacular: Roman is deemed “the ugliest of all the languages spoken in Italy,”⁶⁹ the people of Istria are said to have “brutal intonation,” the speech of Romagna is too womanly because of “the softness of its vocabulary and pronunciation,”⁷⁰ and so on. In the end, Dante determines that the vernacular he is seeking doesn’t exist in any one Italian city or region, but instead, it must contain elements of all of the Italian varieties.

⁶⁷ *The Italian questione della lingua, an interpretative essay* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942).

⁶⁸ *De vulgari eloquentia*, 27.

⁶⁹ Dante adds that this should be no surprise, as Romans “also stand out among all Italians for the ugliness of their manners and their outward appearance.” Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 33.

Dante's *De vulgari* was rediscovered in the sixteenth century, and circulated briefly in manuscript form before being published by Giorgio Trissino in 1529.⁷¹ It is taken up again by an unlikely opponent- Machiavelli- in his *Discorso o Dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua* (1524-1525).⁷² In this document—one of Machiavelli's lesser known discourses—the author takes issue with Dante's idea of a *lingua curiale*, arguing that the author of the *Inferno* was essentially using Florentine all along, and that Florentine is, without a doubt, the linguistic prototype for modern Italian. He enters into 'dialogue' with the defunct Dante in the *De vulgari*, and forces him to 'admit' that the language he is using is really Florentine, and not a pieced-together, artificial creation, as he would create with his *lingua curiale*. While he still discards virtually all other regional dialects in favor of Florentine, Machiavelli also rejects Dante's notion that no single dialect can serve as a vernacular example for all of Italy; in his mind, there is only one worthy of that status and, for him, it is Florentine.

So what do Dante and Machiavelli have to do with Rabelais and the vernacular? As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this is not the first time that links between Rabelais and elements of the Italian *questione della lingua* have been suggested. In her article, "Rabelais et le vulgaire illustre"

⁷¹ Trissino bases his *Castellano* on Dante's vision of a *lingua curiale*; in it, he espouses the idea of a courtly language based off of the different dialects of Italy, rather than just Tuscan.

⁷² The work wasn't published until 1730, and only as an appendix to Benedetto Varchi's *Ercolano*.

Mireille Huchon argues that Rabelais- via Trissino and other *questione della lingua* participants, as well as potentially via Dante's own *De vulgari eloquentia*- creates a *lingua curiale* which is not based upon any actual, contemporary spoken *or* written vernacular, but which is created by combining bits and pieces of literary vernaculars and regional dialects; that is, every linguistic bit which Rabelais deems most worthy to grace the pages of his masterpiece. Huchon argues that Rabelais did not have intentions like his later literary compatriots, Du Bellay and Ronsard, to "illustrate" the existing French language, but rather, that he builds from an older, Italian *questione della lingua* tradition of actively electing and/or creating a more prestigious, literary vernacular.

While I concede that Dante's *De vulgari* could have been an influence on Rabelais' own linguistic theories in concept, I take issue with Huchon's argument that Rabelais is creating a purely artificial *lingua curiale* because it largely ignores the impact of *individual* regional dialects in such an endeavor.

While both Rabelais and Dante include degrading stories about people who use certain linguistic varieties, nowhere does Rabelais blatantly reject any single dialect from his language, as Dante had done with his *lingua curiale*; even if he subtly signals those dialects he considers 'superior' to others via episodes such as the first meeting with Panurge and the *écolier*

limousin, lexical examples in his book abound from every corner of France.⁷³

While Machiavelli and Rabelais may seem to have little in common on the outside regarding their linguistic outlooks, they share one very important outlook: the language each esteems and uses above all others is the one identified with the place each was born and had the majority of his life experiences, his natural and maternal tongue. While Rabelais does not envisage linguistic unification via the reduction of the French language to one single, dialectal norm as Machiavelli does with Florentine for Italian, he does promote his native vernaculars. Though it is not so pronounced as Machiavelli's or other participants' in the *questione della lingua* debates, Rabelais does put forth a subtle but clear preference for *francien* varieties compatible with as his native *tourangeau* dialect.

As for Dante, I would argue that the idea of a *lingua curiale* as put forth in the *De vulgari* is far too theoretical to characterize Rabelais' own language, which although extremely educated and erudite at times, still reflects the quotidian popular culture the author lived and experienced. Rabelais may, as Huchon suggests, create an artificial language in the sense that he enjoys linguistic experimentation, but unlike Dante, Rabelais does not reject the real in favor of the theoretical. Furthermore, despite potentially negative regional

⁷³ In fact, Rabelais even includes *limousin* lexemes such as *mascherabe*, *banjard*, *pinard*, and *tupin*. See Huchon, *Oeuvres complètes*, « Notice sur la langue de Rabelais », I.

stereotypes such as ones that we see in the *limousin* episode, Rabelais generally embraces linguistic multiplicity and actively promotes that diversity in his books. Dante's *lingua curiale* is an elite, written language that is carefully cultivated by the best poets. Rabelais' vernacular remains, above all, a language representative of the diversity—good or bad—of its nation.

Conclusion: A Call for Further Exploration of Dialect in Rabelais

Le Poète pourra apporter, de mon conseil, mots Picards,
Normands, et autres qui sont sous la Couronne: Tout est
Français, puisqu'ils sont du pays du Roi. C'est un des plus
insignes moyens d'accroître notre Langue.⁷⁴

By my advice, the poet may bring Picard and Norman words,
and others which are under the Crown: All are French, since
they are of the King's land. This is one of the most
distinguished means of advancing our language.

In the above citation from Jacques Peletier's 1555 *Art poétique*, the Renaissance polymath encourages poets to embrace the diversity of their language, and to enrich their lexicon with regional linguistic varieties. Certainly, François Rabelais was already embracing dialectal diversity at the beginning of the century; a trend which he kept true to throughout his entire *oeuvre*.

As we have shown in this chapter, despite the fact that he embraced

⁷⁴ Francis Goyet, *Traité de poétique et de rhétorique de la Renaissance: Sébillet, Aneau, Peletier, Fouquelin, Ronsard* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1990): 251.

and promoted linguistic diversity in his books, Rabelais nonetheless shows a subtle preference for *francien* regional varieties such as his native *tourangeau* dialect, a bias which may very well be reflective of a larger partiality in French society, as the government made efforts to bring the *langues d'oc* and the *langues d'oïl* under the same administration. This is not, however, reflected in sixteenth-century French treatises on the vernacular, documents in which dialectal standards are rarely mentioned, and when they are, there is very little consensus regarding *which* regional dialect should serve as the standard for France.

More important in this aspect is our comparison of Rabelais' treatment of regional dialects with those we see in Italian *questione della lingua* documents, especially Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* and Machiavelli's *Discorso o dialogo sopra la lingua italiana*. While both texts provide some potentially interesting links with Rabelais' own treatment of the vernacular and regional variety, Rabelais' own idea for the vernacular is neither *curiale*, as Dante's, nor centralized and reduced to one variety, as Machiavelli's is.

All of this suggests that, although he didn't always completely follow the trends in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century vernacular debates, Rabelais was nonetheless very much attuned to the issues we see in such documents. Beyond common sixteenth-century linguistic tropes—such as what

constitutes ‘natural language’—Rabelais shows an astute interest in mother tongue, and in particular, mother tongue in relation to regional identity. In his own work there is an important albeit subtle preference for his vernacular varieties of the Loire Valley and Ile-de-France; this is reflective not only of the fact that this was the region he had the most experience and time in, but also reflective of actual linguistic trends in France. Marginalized dialectal forms of the nether regions of France such as *limousin* are also marginalized in Rabelais’ work, such as is the case with the poorly treated *ecolier limousin*.

In this present study, I have addressed regional dialect and linguistic variety in the works of Rabelais in a limited context of *francien* versus non-*francien* varieties. Indeed, a great deal of research—sociological, linguistic, and literary—remains to be completed in this area. In particular, further studies on the marginalization of polarized dialects such as *limousin* could further illuminate why Rabelais chose to give that particular regional identity to a formerly generalized *écumeur du latin* character. The election of this identity was clearly not completely arbitrary, and further research on the status of that particular region and dialect in sixteenth-century France will help us to better understand the Limousine schoolboy’s unfortunate story.

Furthermore, more linguistic data needs to be compiled on *tourangeau*

and other Loire Valley dialects from the sixteenth century. When Lazare Sainéan published his immense work on Rabelais nearly a century ago, such data did not exist, and it remains inadequate today. Such information would help modern readers to better understand not just how Rabelais is *thinking* about regional dialects in his works, and not only how he is creating his hierarchies off of his own and/or any existing societal biases, but also how he is *using* regional dialect. While Sainéan's work is vastly important in this process, it is wanting in certain areas; these gaps in linguistic research will hopefully be able to filled in by modern scholars.

To conclude with the abovementioned citation from Michael Heath's *Rabelais*, one of the glories of Rabelais is indeed the diversity of his language, but perhaps not only in the sense of 'diversity'—in terms of word-play and lexical inventiveness—as Heath meant it. One of the amazing things about Rabelais is that he—more than any other early modern French author—represents the regional diversity of the vernacular in his books. Clues about regional languages in Rabelais' work should not be ignored, but rather, exploited by future generations of literary, linguistic, and socio-historians, who will, such as in the present study, not only explore *what* languages are used in Rabelais, but *how* they are used and how characters marked by certain regional and social linguistic traits are treated. In doing so, we will be able to

answer new questions not only about Rabelais' own linguistic preferences and biases, but also question those of the burgeoning nation he lived in.

CHAPTER 2

JOACHIM DU BELLAY: VERNACULAR ANXIETY IN VERSE

Introduction: Du Bellay and the Vernacular

Of the three authors addressed in this present study, Joachim Du Bellay is by far the most anxiety-ridden over issues in the vernacular. He is also the only author of the three to be *directly* implicated in the actual debates over language in sixteenth-century France. Paradoxically, while he aspired to be known for his poetry, his *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise* (1549) is probably his most lasting literary legacy, remaining a canonical text in the study of the history of the French language even today.

While he may still be listed in modern anthologies of French poetry as one of the seminal crusaders of the French vernacular, Du Bellay the poet is somewhat of a fair weather friend to his native tongue, as he vacillates between extolling the virtues of the vernacular and arguing that, in its poetic undertakings, it will never reach the heights of the Classical languages, and even in his own career, returning to composing poetry in Latin—that is, doing exactly what he urged budding poets *not* to do in his *Deffence*. Tracing the poetic influences in his work across the course of his career, we can follow Du Bellay from a serious, Petrarchizing neophyte in the *Olive* to a

more carefree, Maroticizing poet in the *Divers Jeux Rustiques*, essentially moving full circle from his words of advice against older, native genres in the *Deffence*. Du Bellay the poet certainly does not always adhere to his own advice as presented in his treatise for defending and illustrating the vernacular, making it apparent that as he progresses in his literary career, he carefully changes his own philosophy about vernacular poetry, and indeed, the French language itself, constantly altering it to fit his current geographic, linguistic, and literary situation.

In this present study on vernacular anxieties in the sixteenth century, one of the questions we must ask in examining Du Bellay is: What connection do the poet's plans for embellishing the vernacular—as laid out in his *Deffence*—have with the vacillation in sources and intent in his own poetry? Furthermore, if we are to read the contents of Du Bellay's poems as an expression of his intimate thoughts and anxieties—which he urges the reader to do as he takes on an explicitly confessional tone, most notably in his *Regrets*—how can we explain the drastic change of heart between his earlier works written in France, and those written during his stay in Rome? And finally—and most seminally to this present study—can Du Bellay's change of heart over using vernacular sources be linked effectively to his homesickness and nostalgia for France, and perhaps more importantly, to

any potential anxiety over being unable to communicate in his mother tongue during his stay in Rome?

In this study, I will examine these questions in greater detail, focusing on the anxieties over native poetic sources which I believe are inherently linked with anxieties in communication in Du Bellay's work. In particular, I will look at how his own regional circumstance—transplanting from his native Anjou to Rome—affects his use of native, French sources such as Clément Marot in his poetry, as well as his understanding of his own, linguistic and poetic heritage. While I will rely extensively on his ideas as presented in the *Deffence*, I will extend the examination of his theoretical material into the more tangible evidence of how he moves from theorizing about the vernacular to actually using it in his own poetry.

Even though Du Bellay argues for the improvement and embellishment of the French language early on in his literary career, as time progresses, and when he is actually taken away from his native land (and native vernacular) on business in Italy, he loses his earlier lofty ideals for the French language and yearns for simpler native poetic and linguistic sources. For Du Bellay, linguistic 'exile' translates into a deeper sense of appreciation for older, unembellished forms, as well as a sense of bitterness for years wasted chasing foreign sources.

The « Deffence » and the Counter-defense of the Vernacular:

Du Bellay and Aneau

...c'est dans cette infidélité à son propre manifeste que réside
justement pour une large partie l'originalité du poète [Du
Bellay].⁷⁵

....it's precisely in this infidelity to his own manifesto that a
large part of the originality of the poet [Du Bellay] lies.

The above citation from Wilhemus J. Bots' thesis on Du Bellay may appear to be a pessimistic way to view the sixteenth-century author's literary discretions, but truly, it points to an inherent paradox within Du Bellay's work. As numerous critics have remarked⁷⁶, Du Bellay doesn't always practice in his poetry the linguistic or poetic doctrine that he preaches in his notorious *Deffence*. But, as Bots notes, this is also exactly what makes Du Bellay such an intriguing poet to examine, and for the purposes of this current study, it highlights the integral worries Du Bellay struggles with in

⁷⁵ Wilhelmus Bots, *Joachim DuBellay entre l'histoire littéraire et la stylistique: Essai de synthèse* (Doctoral thesis, Leiden University, 1970), 29.

⁷⁶ See in particular Henri Chamard, *Histoire de la Pléiade* (Paris : H. Didier, 1939) and L. Keating, "Promise and Performance: Du Bellay's *Deffence* et illustration de la langue francoyse," *French Review* 45.3 (Supplement) (1971): 77-83.

trying to (and perhaps, ultimately gives up trying to) create a vernacular poetry worthy of his own standards. While we will examine the *Deffence* briefly in the context of Montaigne, here I shall give the work more thorough consideration, as well as provide a more complete framework for it. We will also observe it in tandem with the counter-work of a virulent challenger of Du Bellay's, Barthélémy Aneau.

Dedicating it to his cousin and benefactor the Cardinal Jean Du Bellay and purporting to compose it for no other reason than his 'natural affection' for his country ("l'affection naturelle envers ma Patrie"⁷⁷) Joachim Du Bellay writes his *Deffence et Illustration de la langue françoise* with the purported central goal of amplifying and elevating the French literary vernacular to new heights. He expresses concern that his compatriots are devoting too much of their time to writing in and translating from Latin and Greek instead of working on strengthening their own vernacular.

Although it is not an *ars poetica* in the classic sense of the term, Du Bellay writes the *Deffence* as a critique of the grammarian and jurist Thomas Sebillet's 1548 *Art Poétique*, while trying to educate his compatriots on the Pléiade's⁷⁸ idealized vision of the benefits of employing Latin and Greek

⁷⁷ *La Deffence, et illustration de la langue françoise* (1549), Edition et dossier critiques par Jean-Charles Monferran (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2008), 68.

⁷⁸ See Margaret Ferguson, *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defences of Poetry* (Yale University Press, 1983). Ferguson emphasizes the defensive quality of the *Deffence*, and argues that this defensive quality is inherent to the

poetry, rather than older native French verse, as a model for imitation while writing in the vernacular. To be sure, Du Bellay's and Sebillet's works have much in common at the core; they're both divided into two books, both comment on banal aspects of the vernacular such as grammar and pronunciation, and both have as a central emphasis "art" as inherent to poetry. But, as Marcel Françon notes, the idea of "art" in the *Deffence* is quite diverse from that in the *Art poétique*; whereas the *Art poétique* belongs more to the genre of "arts de seconde rhétorique" and uses "art" in the sense of *technique*, Du Bellay refers to "art" to designate "la culture, l'érudition."⁷⁹ The emphasis on the theoretical aspect of the *Deffence* over the technical is an important one, too, as the advice it offer drives towards an *inspirational* goal of poetic perfection through *cultivation*, rather than a *mechanical* goal by means of procedural skills.⁸⁰

We must again turn to Italy as a source for the French debates, as the *Deffence* is very noticeably influenced by the work of the Paduan scholar,

creation of a 'manifesto' for an ideological collective like the *Pléiade*. As she notes: "Like later authors of manifestos, Du Bellay seeks to make room for a new generation of writers; in so doing, he takes what a Russian manifesto calls "a whack at the public taste." (19) According to Ferguson, Du Bellay also makes that argument of "self-assertion of self-defense" which small avant-garde societies typically make, according to Renato Poggioli, as they define themselves against "society in the larger sense." (19)

⁷⁹ Françon, "L'Eloge de la France chez J. du Bellay et chez Ronsard," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 38 (1976): 65.

⁸⁰ See Daniel Aris' and Françoise Joukovsky's introduction to *Du Bellay: Œuvres poétiques* Vol. I (Paris : Bordas, 1993), XV: "La Deffence diffère des arts de rhétorique, et même des arts poétiques publiés par la suite, parce que c'est une œuvre du futur. Au lieu de codifier, elle exprime le désir d'inventer, et elle mise sur un langage capable de faciliter cette création. C'est un saut dans le vide d'où naîtra le poème.»

Sperone degli Speroni⁸¹; in fact, much of the *Deffence* is taken directly from the *Dialogo delle lingue* (1542), some parts translated literally word for word.⁸² The *Dialogo* takes place in Bologna in 1529-1530 as a conversation between six characters, some real historical figures, some imagined, about the appropriateness of contemporary Italian dialects as literary languages. Along with a courtier (“il Cortigiano”) and a scholar (“lo scolare”), Speroni also includes the humanist scholar, poet, and cardinal, Pietro Bembo (“Bembo”); the Chair of Greek and Latin at the University of Padua, Lazzaro Bonamico (“Lazaro”); the renowned Hellenist Giovanni Lascaris (“Lascari”); and the Neo-Aristotelian philosopher from Padua, Pietro Pomponazzi (“Peretto”).

Du Bellay departs from the Italian piece in a significant way, however, by not composing his treatise in the dialogic⁸³ form so inherent in earlier, Italian debates. By doing so, he thus disallows any sort of ‘debate’

⁸¹ The first scholar to note Du Bellay’s appropriation of Speroni’s text was Pierre Villey in his *Les sources italiennes de la “Deffense et illustration de la langue françoise” de Joachim du Bellay* (Paris: H. Champion, 1908). Most critics since have accepted Villey’s findings at face-value and they do not delve into intertextual comparisons of Du Bellay and Speroni, assuming that there is little difference beyond ordering of passages in the two texts. However, as Terence Cave suggests and Ignacio Navarrete explores in greater detail, there is a great deal to learn from exactly how and *what* Du Bellay appropriates Speroni’s material in his French treatise. See Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems in Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1985), 77, and Navarrete, “Strategies of Appropriation in Speroni and Du Bellay,” *Comparative Literature* 41.2 (1989): 141-154.

While I believe that there is much to learn from Du Bellay’s use- and, indeed, mis-use- of Speroni’s text, I have left this commentary out of the current study, which focuses more on how Du Bellay appropriates his own theory into his work, and not his appropriation of other authors.

⁸² One need only consult Monferran’s edition of the *Deffence* to see the sheer quantity of the text that is pillaged from Speroni; not only does Monferran include the *Dialogo* in its entirety next to the *Deffence* in the original Italian as well as in French translation, but he actually marks the passages of the *Deffence* which are lifted directly from Speroni’s work. The length of some of the passages pillaged from the Italian work is at times quite remarkable.

⁸³ That is, Du Bellay does not allow any sort of conversation between himself and other human participants in the language debates. His work remains subtly and more figuratively “dialogic” through the use of intertextual references to classical and medieval texts.

within the text itself, cleverly working to establish himself, and more importantly, the *Brigade* as a whole, as authorities in the campaign for the vernacular. Whereas Du Bellay paints his advice in the *Deffence* as expert knowledge⁸⁴ on the subject of poetry, Speroni's dialogic form allows for readers to examine the different facets of the debate based on the diverse arguments of the participants; and indeed, although he ends his *Dialogo* with Bembo speaking to the merits of the Tuscan dialect over all others, Speroni does *not* offer a clear answer to any of the questions entreated upon by the dialogue's participants, instead leaving it up to his readers to determine.⁸⁵ Du Bellay also eliminates the questions over dialectal standards and courtly language that appear in Speroni's text, which, while inherent to the Italian *questione della lingua* debates, were not as pertinent in the French context.⁸⁶

Book I of the *Deffence* has three main arguments. First, that all languages are born essentially equal: no one language is fundamentally

⁸⁴ See Navarette, "Strategies of Appropriation in Speroni and Du Bellay," 149. Navarette refers to Du Bellay's work as "novelistic" in that "Du Bellay's own voice must struggle with the assimilated voices not only of the characters from Speroni's dialogue, but with Horace, Cicero, Quintilian, Geofroy Tory, Etienne Dolet, Jacques Pelletier du Mans, and all his other sources."

⁸⁵ Modern critics have not come to any consensus on the question of who 'wins' in the *Dialogo*. Villey, *Les sources italiennes de la "Deffense et illustration de la langue françoise" de Joachim du Bellay*, 24, argues that Bembo acts as a "porte parole" for Speroni, but more recent critics do not echo that sentiment. In his comprehensive study on the *Questione*, Hall is unable to categorize Speroni with any of the major vernacular theories he is able to parse out in the debates, so he lists his *Dialogo* in several different categories. Cecil Grayson argues the case for Peretto. See Grayson, *A Renaissance Controversy: Latin or Italian?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960).

⁸⁶ This is not to say that there were not anxieties over regional varieties in sixteenth century French, as quite the contrary was true, as evidenced in my other chapters. However, in the French treatises, there is very little discussion over dialectal standard, which was a central issue in the *Italian questione della lingua* documents.

superior to any other. Second, that languages, though accorded equal status from birth, must be kept alive through careful cultivation: a language cannot flourish if it is not properly challenged through ‘worthy’ written endeavors. Finally, that Latin and Greek, while essential languages to know for the purposes of literary imitation, are taking too much time and energy away from the study and perfection of the mother tongue: translation is a worthwhile effort only in that it makes Greek and Latin texts accessible to us in the vernacular for the purposes of imitation.

The first point, on the egalitarianism of languages, is an important one for the “*Deffence*,” taken directly from Speroni’s *Dialogo*.⁸⁷ As Du Bellay notes, languages are all just different versions of the same man-made creation, a device to move from understanding to communication:

...les Langues ne sont nées d’elles mesmes en façon d’Herbes,
Racines, et Arbres : les unes infirmes, et debiles en leurs
espèces : les autres saines, et robustes, et plus aptes à porter le
faiz des conceptions humaines : mais toute leur vertu est née au

⁸⁷ Here Du Bellay borrows directly from Peretto’s discourse. The Italian reads: “Dunque, non nascono le lingue per sé medesime, a guisa di alberi o d’erbe, quale debole e inferma nella sua specie, quale sana e robusta e atta meglio a portar la soma di nostri umani concetti ; ma ogni loro virtù nasce al mondo dal voler de’ mortali. » *La Deffence, et illustration de la langue françoise*, 259, 261.

monde du vouloir, et arbitre des mortelz.⁸⁸

...Languages are not of themselves born in the manner of
Grasses, Roots, and Trees: the ones infirm, and feeble in their
species: the others healthy, and robust, and more apt to carry
the feats of human conceptions: but all their virtue is born in
the world of the mortal will and desires.

All languages being equal, Du Bellay does not see why some should shun
the vernacular for seemingly superior languages such as Greek and Latin:

...je ne puis assez blamer la sotte arrogance, et temerité
d'aucuns de notre nation, qui n'étans riens moins Grecz, ou
Latins, deprisent et rejettent d'un sourcil que Stoïque, toutes
choses ecrites en François : et ne me puyz assez émerveiller de
l'étrange opinion d'aucuns sçavans, qui pensent que nostre
vulgaire soit incapable de toutes bonnes lettres, et erudition :
comme si une invention pour le Language seulement devoit

⁸⁸ Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration*, 74.

estre jugée bonne, ou mauvaise.⁸⁹

...I cannot sufficiently chastise the stupid arrogance, and temerity of certain individuals of our nation, who being hardly Greek or Latin, devalue and reject with a ‘Stoic’ raise of an eyebrow, all things written in French: and I cannot marvel enough at the strange idea of some wise men, who think that our vernacular is incapable of all good writing, and erudition: as if a thought ought to be judged as good or bad simply by looking at the language in which it is conceived.

However, even though all languages are born equal, Du Bellay argues that this does not mean that they are all being equally exploited to reach their maximum potential. French, he argues, has been left like a wild plant in the desert, uncultivated for many years, and thus lives on in an inferior state, unruly and unrefined. Latin and Greek are only ‘richer’ languages because they have been carefully developed over the centuries by the poets who used them. The French language, in order to reach the richness and greatness of Latin and Greek, must now, too, be cultivated through the imitation of these

⁸⁹ Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration*, 76.

great Latin and Greek poets who have already amplified their languages to their *full* extent. Somewhat paradoxically, although the goal of the treatise is allegedly to *defend* the French vernacular, Du Bellay would not have vernacular poets serve as models for imitation. On the contrary, he doesn't believe that there are enough *worthy* examples for imitation in the French corpus, and so he directs his disciples to Latin and Greek poets. Translation, however, should be used sparingly, as translating Greek and Latin works into French will never produce results as good as the originals, and essentially does a disservice to the source languages.

In Book II, Du Bellay sets out to elaborate more on the 'how' and 'why' of imitating Greek and Latin verse over more native French poetics. In brief, for poetic form, Du Bellay specifies that poets should move away from the old French styles that we might label as forms commonly associated with the *Grand Rhétoriqueur* poets—*chants*, *virelays*, *epistles*, etc.—and go towards the more ancient models such as odes and eclogues.⁹⁰ We must note here that Du Bellay—and his Pléiade counterparts—has a somewhat limited vision of pre-sixteenth-century French literature compared to what we think of today. As Grahame Castor remarks in his *Pléiade Poetics*;

⁹⁰ As the focus of the present study is on Du Bellay's use of and relationship with the vernacular and native sources in his poetry, and not on poetic genre and form, I will not be examining Book II of the *Deffence* in great detail.

....they [the Pléiade] ignored everything which we now think of as most characteristic of that period: *contes pieux*, *chansons de geste*, *romans d'aventure*, *chansons de toile*, *fabliaux gaulois*. For Ronsard and his friends, pre-sixteenth century French literature consisted of the *Roman de la Rose* (which they admired with reservations) and the *grand rhétoriciens*. Villon was *trop peuple* for them to consider him seriously as a poet, and the work of the one aristocratic writer of real merit whom the fifteenth century produced—Charles d'Orléans—was to remain in manuscript until the eighteenth century.⁹¹

Whether it stems from this limited vision of his ancestral literary roots or not, in his second book of the *Deffence*, Du Bellay is vehemently against poets using anything—form, subject matter, etc.—common in the French literary tradition. Instead, he directs poets to more foreign sources.

In terms of lexicon in the new, French poetry, Du Bellay wants the vernacular to be used in all circumstances; if ever an instance arises where a concept that the poet wishes to portray does not have a corresponding signifier in French, it's acceptable to invent new words. Here, he recognizes

⁹¹ *Pléiade Poetics: A Study in Sixteenth-century Thought and Terminology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 7.

that the vernacular is constantly changing, and he thinks it won't hurt to try to help it evolve by inventing new words:

...je veux bien avertir celuy, qui entreprendra un grand oeuvre,
qu'il ne craigne pas d'inventer, adopter, et composer à
l'immitation des Grecz quelques Motz François, comme
Ciceron se vante d'avoir fait en sa Langue.⁹²

...I really want to advise he who attempts a great masterpiece,
that he not be afraid of inventing, adopting, and composing
some French words, in imitation of the Greeks, as Cicero
boasts of doing in his native tongue.

As Du Bellay argues, words are created to signify meaning, and as such,
with new conceptions comes the necessity to create new words:

Nul, s'il n'est vrayment du tout ignare, voire privé de Sens
commun, ne doute point que les choses n'ayent premierement
eté: puis après les motz avoir été inventez pour les signifier: et

⁹² Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration*, 144-145.

par consequent aux nouvelles choses estre necessaire imposer
nouveaux motz, principalement és Ars, dont l'usage n'est point
encores commun, et vulgaire, ce, qui peut arriver souvent à
nostre Poëte, au quel sera necessaire emprunter beaucoup de
choses non encor' traitées en nostre Langue. Les Ouvriers,
(afin que je ne parle des Sciences liberales) jusques aux
Laboureurs mesmes, et toutes sortes de gens mecaniques ne
pourroint conserver leurs metiers, s'ilz n'usoint de motz à eux
usitez, et à nous incongneuz.⁹³

Nobody, unless he is truly ignorant, that is deprived of
common sense, doubts at all that 'things' were first; then,
afterwards, words had been invented to signify them; and
consequently, for new things it is necessary to impose new
words, principally in the Arts, in which their usage has not yet
become commonplace and vulgar, this, which can often
happen to our poet, for whom it will be necessary to borrow
many things not yet treated in our language. Workers (so that I
address the liberal sciences) and even manual laborers, and all
sorts of craftsmen would never be able to conserve their

⁹³ Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration*, 145-146.

professions, if they only used words proper to them, and
unknown to us.

Just as workers need to create specific jargon as their professions become more specialized, so do the French people need to adapt linguistically to the changing world around them.

In another piece of lexical advice, Du Bellay argues that poets should avoid using Latin or Greek words without first making them sound ‘French.’ What seems the most solid recommendation that Du Bellay gives his readers is in Chapter XI of the second book: in order to build an expansive vocabulary, the poet should frequent the society of workers of all industries and learn the vocabulary of diverse *métiers*.

Modern critics such as Eric MacPhail and David J. Hartley⁹⁴ have pointed to the inherent *proto-nationalistic* tone of the *Deffence*. While there certainly is an underlying theme of promoting French for France’s sake in the text, we must be careful in labeling it ‘patriotic’ in the modern sense of the term. Instead, we should focus on the fact that nascent national interests

⁹⁴ Eric MacPhail, “Nationalism and Italianism in the Work of Joachim Du Bellay,” *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 39 (1990): 47-53, and David J. Hartley, “Du Bellay et la patrie: Echos littéraires,” *Du Bellay* (Angers: Presse de l’Université d’Angers, 1990), 653-662. Hartley’s piece is particularly interesting for the present study because he links Du Bellay’s patriotism in his linguistic and poetic efforts to very similar efforts by potential Classical influences such as Ovid, Horace, and Cicero; a binding element in all these works is a deep love for particular regional homelands as well as a strong identity with and commitment to the native vernacular languages.

are inherently linked with linguistic progress for Du Bellay. The success of France as a nation⁹⁵ capable of producing a worthy, national literary corpus ultimately rests with the success of the French vernacular, which poets born there should cultivate via the techniques outlined in his treatise.

While the general tone of the *Deffence* is positive, pointing to great possibilities for the French language and national poetry, there are a number of complications with the treatise. First, this is not much of a defense in the sense of a preventative measure, as Du Bellay offers little praise for the current state of the French vernacular, nor does he offer any proof that his native tongue is in peril. He furthermore *illustrates* very little about the French vernacular or explains very thoroughly his own conception of imitation. As Margaret Ferguson and Ignacio Navarette both point out, part of Du Bellay's problem lies in his attempt to transfer Speroni's *Dialogo* into the French context; because of the diversity of the two situations, Du Bellay picks and chooses the parts of the Italian dialogue that best work for his own argument, and leaves other parts that are essential to the comprehension of the original piece. As Ferguson notes, Du Bellay includes pieces of both Bembo's and Pereto's views in the *Dialogo*, "but his argument is less lucid than Speroni's, largely because he does not clearly distinguish the

⁹⁵ We are not using the modern sense of "nation" here, as the notion did not exist in the sixteenth century as it does today. Rather, we are referring to a national in its strictly etymological terms—as a 'place where people are born.'

issue of writing vernacular poetry from that of translating prose works.”⁹⁶

He doesn't emphasize the competing claims that beset the arguments of those involved in the *Dialogo*, either. Navarette, furthermore points out that Du Bellay's reading of Speroni is actually a “strong misreading”⁹⁷ that radically skews the *linguistic* questions in the *Questione della lingua* dialogue in order to fit the *literary* questions he focuses on in his *Deffence*.

Profoundly disconnected from this Italian context, Du Bellay doesn't even appear to be very convinced by his own arguments in favor of the vernacular. This is particularly evident if we look at the vacillation in the titles of his chapters; in Book One, for example, Chapter III is titled “Pourquoy la Langue Françoise n'est si riche que la Grecque, et Latine” (Why the French language isn't as rich as Greek or Latin), followed by Chapter IIII, “Que la Langue Françoise n'est si pauvre que beaucoup l'estiment” (That the French language isn't as impoverished as many think it to be), and then again, after several chapters extolling the possibilities for the budding vernacular, Chapter XI is called “Qu'il est impossible d'egaler les Anciens en leurs Langues” (That it is impossible to equal the Ancients in their Tongues). While he proclaims that all languages are created equal, and says that in consequence, theoretically anyone should be able to talk about

⁹⁶ Ferguson, *Trials of Desire*, 33.

⁹⁷ Navarette, “Strategies of Appropriation in Speroni and Du Bellay,” 143.

anything in any given language, in practice, all we can do in French is imitate Latin and Greek poetry. If this is so, there would be no hope of actually ever writing anything better than that what was written in these two languages. Consequently, it would seem that the French language, as Du Bellay paints it, will never be more adequate than what it is at present.

This, at least, is one of the main charges made against Du Bellay by Barthélemy Aneau. In the entire French language debate, Aneau's criticism of the *Deffence* is by far the most 'virulent and fully detailed'⁹⁸ attack on DuBellay, and through him, Pléiade poetic aspirations.⁹⁹ In his *Quintil Horatien* (1550?), Aneau disassembles Du Bellay's arguments from the *Deffence* one by one, ultimately declaring that by basing his evaluations of native French poetry on external sources, Du Bellay is an 'internal enemy'¹⁰⁰ to the French language. His recommendations will only weaken, not strengthen, the vernacular.

While Aneau's *Quintil* is not a true 'dialogue,' it does build upon this Italian *questione della lingua* tradition in that, instead of being addressed to an anonymous public, it addresses its comments to and 'dialogues' with a

⁹⁸ See Monferran's introduction to the *Quintil* as published with his critical dossier to the *Deffence et illustration*, 299.

⁹⁹ After 1555, the *Quintil horatien* was always included anonymously in printed copies of Sebillet's *Art poetique*.

¹⁰⁰ For an excellent analysis of this 'internal enemy' formulation of Du Bellay in the *Quintil*, see Richard Regosin, "Langue et patrie: La Contre-'deffence' du Quintil Horatian Lyonnais," *Lyon et l'illustration de la langue française à la Renaissance* (Lyon, France: ENS, 2003), 505-516.

particular person. In this case, Aneau ‘talks’ to the absent Du Bellay, constructing from his treatise a peculiar, apostrophic address.¹⁰¹ But we must point out that, in many ways, Du Bellay sets up his text for this sort of reaction. In a perfunctory “Au lecteur” address, he asks the reader not to “condemn” his book before having thoroughly examined his reasoning:

L’auteur prie les Lecteurs differer leur jugement jusques à la fin du Livre, et ne le condamner sans avoir premierement bien veu, et examiné ses raisons.¹⁰²

The author asks that his readers defer their judgment until the end of the book, and that they not condemn him without first having well read, and examined his arguments.

To Du Bellay’s supplication, Aneau sardonically replies:

Soies certain que ceste requeste me ha semblé estre tant civile :
que je heusse esté incivil de le faire autrement. Et pourtant,
après l’avoir leu, et releu, et bien examiné les raisons : je ne l’ay

¹⁰¹ In terms of style, this makes Aneau’s work very much like Machiavelli’s *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua*.

¹⁰² Du Bellay, *La deffence et illustration*, 70.

pas condamné (suyvant ta deffense) mais bien y ay noté, et marqué aucuns pointz, qui me semblent dignes de correction amiable, et modeste, sans aucune villainie, injure, et calumnie, ne simple, ne figurée.¹⁰³

Be certain that this request seemed to me to be so civil: that it would have been uncivil of me to act otherwise. And nevertheless, after having read, and re-read, and well examined the reasoning: I did not condemn it (following your urging) but annotated it well, and marked some points which seem worthy of amiable and modest correction, without any nastiness, offense, or false accusation, neither simple, nor figured.

Later in his *Deffence*, Du Bellay recommends that no author put out to publish any work that hasn't been examined thoroughly by some 'wise,' unbiased individual; he gives the example of the character of Quintil in Horace's *Ars poetica* as a model of someone equipped for such unbiased scrutiny, a critic who will only allow the best material to come to the public's eye. Regrettably for Du Bellay, Aneau is all too happy to take on the role of

¹⁰³ Quintil Horatien, in *La Deffence, et illustration de la langue françoise (1549)*, Edition et dossier critiques par Jean-Charles Monferran (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2008), 304.

Quintil; in the text, he even flaunts having translated Horace's *Ars poetica* before Peletier or anyone else.¹⁰⁴ To add salt to the wound he is slowly opening up in exposing what he considers to be the errors of Du Bellay's *Deffence*, Aneau begins by translating into French a section of Horace's *Ars poetica*, in order to prove that "il n'est si difficile à tourner les Poetes en françois" (it's not so difficult to convert [classical] poetry into French).¹⁰⁵

Thus disguised as the figure of Quintil, Aneau proceeds to dismantle Du Bellay's arguments:

Je doncq estant revestu de la personne, et nom d'icelluy Quintil
propose faire l'acte d'icelluy en ton oeuvre, pour faire plaisir à
toy, selon ta propre ordonnance, et à d'autres pour commune
congnissance. Or escoute doncq' patiemment, et entendz
sans courroux, la correction de ton œuvre.¹⁰⁶

Being accordingly re-attired in the body and name of this here
Quintil, I propose to undertake the role of him in your work, to
please you, according to your own decree, and that of others by

¹⁰⁴ The influence of this translation should not be overestimated, however. Aneau's translation was done in his youth (before 1530), and likely abandoned at the news of Pelletier's translation (1541). Nonetheless, the importance of this statement remains that Aneau would have been intimately acquainted with Horace's oeuvre when writing this text.

¹⁰⁵ Aneau, *Quintil horatien*, 306.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

common acquaintance. Now then, listen patiently and hear without anger, the correction of your work.

One main issue that Aneau takes aim at is Du Bellay's criticism of his French poetic predecessors, and his constant lamentation of the poverty and 'sterility' of the French language. In his *Deffence* as well as in the preface to his *Olive*, Du Bellay shuns most of his predecessor native poets and simple native forms and directs novice poets to more *complex* and *foreign* sources. He points to the example of the Romans, who, he argues, 'enriched' their language by imitating Greek sources.

Si les Romains (dira quelqu'un) n'ont vaqué à ce Labeur de traduction, par quelz moyens donques ont ilz peu ainsi enrichir leur Langue, voyre jusque à l'egaller quasi à la Greque ?
Immitant les meilleurs Auteurs Grecz, se transformant en eux, les devorant, et apres les avoir bien digerez, les convertissant en sang, et nourriture, se proposant chacun selon son Naturel, et l'Argument qu'il vouloit elire, le meilleur Auteur, dont ilz observoint diligemment toutes les plus rares, et exquises vertuz, et icelles comme Grephes....entoint, et appliquoint à leur

Langue.¹⁰⁷

If the Romans (someone will say) had ceased this work of translation, by what other means then would they have been able to enrich their language, indeed almost to the point of equaling Greek? Imitating the best Greek authors, transforming themselves into them, devouring them, and after having well digested them, converting them into blood, and food, each one declaring himself according to his nature and the subject he wanted to elect, the best author of which he observed the rarest and most exquisite virtues, and he takes these [virtues] like grafts, joined and applied to their language.

Using the metaphor of innutrition, Du Bellay argues that Roman poets were only able to reach an elevated state of lexical and poetic greatness in their own language by chewing up and digesting already established Greek works, creating new Roman works with only the best elements from those sources. He goes on to say that, while he would rather use native works for inspiration, worthy French predecessor literature is simply lacking in

¹⁰⁷ Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration*, 91.

abundance to be a legitimate source for budding poets. For emphasis on the importance of looking outside of France for inspiration, Du Bellay adds the examples of Virgil and Cicero, who, he argues, would not have been as great as they were had they imitated only native sources of poetics and oratory:

Je voudroy' bien que nostre Langue feut si riche d'Exemples
domestiques, que n'eussions besoing d'avoir recours aux
Etrangers. Mais si Virgile, et Ciceron se feussent contentez
d'imiter ceux de leur Langue, qu'auroint les Latins outre
Ennie, ou Lucrece, outre Crasse ou Antoyne ?¹⁰⁸

I would really like for our language to be so rich in domestic examples that we needn't resort to using foreign sources. But if Virgil and Cicero had contented themselves with imitating those of their [native] tongue, what would be left of the Latins outside of Ennius or Lucretius, Crassus or Antoine?

While he gives some credit to a select few 'worthy' French predecessor authors in his *Deffence*, Du Bellay can in no way be called a

¹⁰⁸ Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration*, 95.

champion of French vernacular sources. Even when he makes an exception for the worthiness of the authors of the *Roman de la Rose*, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, he does so more in veneration of their status as ‘elders’ of the French language than he does in praise of their literary undertakings:

De tous les anciens Poètes François, quasi un seul, Guillaume de Lauris, et Jan de Meun sont dignes d’estre leuz, non tant pour ce qu’il y ait en eux beaucoup de choses, qui se doyvent imiter des Modernes, comme pour y voir quasi comme une premiere Imaige de la Langue Françoisse, venerable pour son antiquité.¹⁰⁹

Of all the old French poets, hardly a single one, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, are worthy of being read, not so much because there are so many things [in their work] to imitate, but because we can view [their work] almost as a primordial image of the French language, venerable for its antiquity.

¹⁰⁹ Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration*, 121.

Aneau, however, argues that their French predecessors' poetry is much richer and substantial than Du Bellay makes it out to be, and is just as worthy, in language and in affluence, as any other national poetry:

Tu accuse à grand tort, et tresingratement l'ignorance de nos
majeurs, que au 9. chapitre moins rudement tu appelles
simplicité, lesquelz nos majeurs certe n'honte esté ne simples,
ne ignorans, ny des choses, ny des parolles. Guillaume de
Lauris, Jan de Meung, Guillaume Alexis, le bon moine de l'Yre,
Messire Nicole Oreme, Alain Chartier, Villon, Meschinot, et
plusieurs autres n'hont point moins bien escrit, ne de moindres,
et pires choses, en la langue de leur temps propre et entiere,
non peregrine, et pour lors de bon aloy, et bonne mise, que
nous à present en la nostre.¹¹⁰

You very wrongly and ungratefully accuse the ignorance of our
ancestors, which in chapter nine, you rudely call 'simplicity',
these ancestors certainly were neither simple nor ignorant,

¹¹⁰ Aneau, *Quintil boratien*, 306.

neither in conceptions nor in words. Guillaume de Lorris, Jan de Meun, Guillaume Alexis, the good monk of Yre, Mr.

Nicolas Oresme, Alain Chartier, Villon, Meschinot and several others did not write any worse or lesser things in the language of their time, whole and proper to them, and just as frankly and goodly as we do now in our [present-day tongue].

Furthermore, Aneau argues that these ancestral French poets did not need any *foreign* elements to enrich their poetry; they relied exclusively on their own talents and the native resources available to them, and their poetry is stronger and more significant because of this.

In terms of the French language itself, Aneau criticizes Du Bellay's goals of improving and fortifying it with *only* outside sources. Any French word employed by Du Bellay that sounds a little too Italian, Greek, or Latin in Aneau's analysis is promptly criticized; he would rather only use words that are 'proper' to French usage, and which are adopted into the language by natural evolution, rather than by artificial means such as he sees in the Pléaïde's program of lexical improvement.¹¹¹ Additionally, Aneau argues

¹¹¹ Sometimes, however, Aneau is a little overzealous and overly *confident* in his criticism of Du Bellay's lexicon; for example, he devotes an entire section in his *Quintil* to Du Bellay's use of the word *patrie*. Where Aneau accuses Du Bellay of improperly using an Italianate and overly modern *patrie* over what he considers

that “good” translation is not as impossible as Du Bellay makes it out to be; to make his point, he opens his *Quintil* by including verses from his own translation of Horace’s *Art poétique*. He explains that he did so by simply rendering word for word the original Latin text into the equivalent in “pur françois,” translation which, he points out, Du Bellay establishes as “impossible” in the sixth chapter of the first book of the *Deffence*. Moreover, Aneau criticizes Du Bellay for claiming to “illustrate” the French language without ever really explaining how to do so; instead of complaining about what French ought not to be, Aneau says, Du Bellay should be writing more in the affirmative, explaining exactly how to make it better. He accuses Du Bellay of being a hypocritical admirer of Classical languages who, despite purporting to raise the vernacular to new heights, does nothing but abase it. In his chapter entitled “Sur le 4 chapitre, Admirateurs des Langues Grecque, et Latine” (On the fourth chapter, admirers of the Greek and Latin tongues), Aneau severely chastises Du Bellay for his lack of proactivity:

Tu es de ceulx là, car tu ne fais autre chose par tout l’œuvre,
mesme au second livre que nous induire à Greciser, et latiniser,
en françoys vituperant toujours nostre forme de poësie, comme

the more traditional and ‘native’ *pays*, as Monferran notes, the word *patrie* had already been in use in France since 1516! See *Quintil*, note 34, 314.

vile, et populaire, attribuant à iceulx toutes les vertus, et louanges de bien dire, et bien escrire et par comparaison d'iceux monstres la povreté de nostre langue, sans y remedier nullement et sans l'enrichir d'ung seul mot, d'une seulle vertu, ne bref de rien, sinon que de promesse et d'espoir, disant qu'elle pourra estre, qu'elle viendra, qu'elle sera, etc. Mais quoy ? quand, et comment ? Est cela defense, et illustration ou pluost offense et denigration ? Car en tout ton livre n'y ha ung seul chapitre, non pas une seule sentence, monstrant quelque vertu, lustre, ornement, ou louange de nostre langue françoise, combien qu'elle n'en soit degarnie non plus que les autres...¹¹²

You are of their ilk, because you do nothing else [but admire the Latin and Greek languages] in your entire work, even in the second book where you invite us to Hellenize, and Latinize in French, always vituperating our [French] poetry as vile, and popular, attributing to them [Classical authors] all the virtues and praises of speaking and writing well, and by comparison with them you show the poverty of our language, without

¹¹² Aneau, *Quintil*, 322.

remedying this at all, and without enriching it with a single word, with one sole virtue, in short, without anything, except with promise and hope, saying what it can be, what it will become, what it will be, etc. But what? When, and how? Is this ‘defense’ and ‘illustration’ or rather offense and denigration? For in your whole book there isn’t a single chapter, not even a single sentence, showing any virtue, luster, embellishment, or praise of our French language, as much as it is not any less adorned than any other....

Perhaps what is most inspired—and essential to our current study—in Aneau’s analysis is his understanding of the inherent link between language, history, and literature. Unlike Du Bellay in his *Deffence*, Aneau supports the *anciens* French masters like Marot and his Grand Rhétoriqueur compatriots, and insists that the French literary tradition is rich enough for budding poets to look to for inspiration, rather than having to resort to foreign sources. The ancestral French poets who Du Bellay criticized in his *Deffence* used the linguistic tools available to them at the time they were writing, and we should not condemn their works, but use them as *historical* models upon which to base our own, future writing. In ignoring this critical,

native, heritage, and instead looking towards a too ancient and foreign past, Du Bellay risks losing the linguistic base upon which his current French language is founded; his new vernacular literature is thus left in limbo, with only an imitative, counterfeit linguistic history to look to. Where Du Bellay's linguistic goals are anachronistic and alien—looking to the far foreign past to construct a near, native future—Aneau's goals assimilate linguistic and literary history as continual entities in constant play with each other, and they posit that study of the more immediate, native past is crucial in building a solid imitative literary base for the blossoming, French vernacular. And, as we shall see, even if he never admits it directly in treatise-form, in his poetry, Du Bellay eventually comes to realize as flawed virtually everything that Aneau criticizes him for in the *Quintil*—especially in regards to using native French sources for imitation—and we see a vastly different philosophy and different use of native and foreign sources in his later poetry than that which is presented in the *Deffence*.

Exile and Maternal Linguistic Longing: Du Bellay and Marot

One of the unique things about studying Du Bellay in the context of the sixteenth century French vernacular debates is that he composed not only a treatise on vernacular poetic theory, but also composed poetry that is some of the best of the Pléiade's efforts, thus allowing us to test his theory in action. And although today, modern readers have a tendency to view his theoretical work and poetry in two separate contexts—namely, in the context of the history of the French language for the former, and in the context of Pléiade poetics and Renaissance poetry for the latter—Du Bellay himself viewed both as part of one project. His poetry perpetuates the theory he laid out in his *Deffence*. As François Rigolot incisively notes in his article, “Esprit critique et identité poétique: Joachim Du Bellay préfacier »:

Même si les lecteurs modernes l'oublient parfois, il faut
considérer la *Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Françoise* comme
une longue préface aux premières œuvres poétiques de Du
Bellay.¹¹³

¹¹³ *Du Bellay* (Angers: Presse de l'Université d'Angers, 1990), 28. Rigolot explores the significance of *all* of Du Bellay's preliminary addresses to his various texts, and to his poetic theory as a whole. He shows how Du Bellay's shifting attitude towards his ideas as presented in his *Deffence* can be very accurately chronicled in the prefaces to his poetic oeuvres.

Even if modern readers sometimes forget it, it's necessary to think of the *Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Françoise* as a long preface to Du Bellay's first poetic works.

Also important and useful in examining Du Bellay's literary work is the fact that he, unlike his Pléiade compatriot, Ronsard, did minimal revision of his work. As George Tucker notes in his study on Du Bellay's *Antiquitez de Rome*:

Luckily, the very brevity and intensity of Du Bellay's literary career affords us a relatively clear vision of his poetic development despite its polyvalence....Nor, in general, do we have to contend with variant editions of texts, as is the case with the various *Amours* of Ronsard....As a result perhaps of a shorter life, but also in keeping with the original emphasis in the *Deffence* upon "emendation" in the initial act of creation, Du Bellay's text, once published, is usually definitive, apart from minor alterations to punctuations and orthography.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ *The Poet's Odyssey: Joachim du Bellay and the Antiquitez de Rome* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1990), 14.

Because of the lack of alteration in his work, it is possible to trace his literary trajectory in completely chronological order, and not become diverted along the way by revisionary details. While Du Bellay admits to changing his mind about his earlier literary and linguistic theory as laid out in the *Deffence*, he does so unapologetically, and never goes back to alter his poetry or amend his seminal treatise to reflect his evolving ideas. In our study, this allows us to trace Du Bellay's vision of the vernacular from the composition of the *Deffence* all the way through his Latin poetry as a fully linear progression.

The *Deffence* was not published initially as a stand-alone piece; rather, included with it in its 1549 publication were fifty sonnets from the first *Olive*, *L'Antérotique* and a collection of *Vers lyriques* including thirteen odes. Furthermore, as Rigolot notes, Du Bellay's contemporaries were very much aware of his theories as laid out in the *Deffence* when they addressed his poetry. Even Aneau, Du Bellay's severest contemporary critic, includes evaluations of Du Bellay's poetry as published in his 1549 collection.¹¹⁵ Keeping this in mind, we will in this section examine what happens in Du Bellay's later works—specifically in his *Regrets*—where we begin to see his anxieties over using the vernacular most latently surface.

¹¹⁵ See Rigolot, "Esprit critique et identité poétique: Du Bellay préfacier," 288.

We may begin by observing that, while Du Bellay and the other Pléiade poets claim to have brought a new wave of poetry to the French Renaissance, they did not entirely abandon their antecedent compatriot poets' example. This seems all too obvious in the case of Du Bellay and Marot, as we find a multitude of intertextual references between the works of the poet of Pléiade fame and those of his predecessor who is so severely chastised in the *Deffence*. Despite the fact that outwardly, Du Bellay never seems to move beyond his original analysis of Marot as a plain-speaking composer of outmoded verse, the number of Marotic references that can be found in his works is truly remarkable, and prompts the modern reader to question whether Du Bellay was unaware of this influence, or rather, in his anxiety to propel the French language to new heights through “plus hault” poetic styling, he is in terrible denial of the actual worth of Marot's so-called ‘simple’ native poetics as a worthwhile source of inspiration.

We are offering an intertextual comparison of Du Bellay with Marot because the former is linked in complex and often contradictory ways with the *Grand Rhétoriqueur* tradition in France, a tradition which embraced the native French lyric tradition and exploited it in its verse. He is the example *par excellence* to whom Sebillet directs budding poets in his *Art poétique* and is treated with great reverence in Aneau's *Quintil*, and most notably, his poetry

is archetypal of the native genres which Du Bellay urges future French poets to shun.¹¹⁶ Marot is also a poet linked to a tradition of ‘exile’ poetry in France, and like Du Bellay, is considered a seminal figure in the history of the French language. Unlike Du Bellay, he never composed any formal treatises on language. Instead, he creates a significant amount of verse in which he articulates ideas about the vernacular. Both men, furthermore, experienced residence outside their native France and expressed a heightened awareness of the vernacular while in the removed location. It is this unique combination of the differing use of native sources in their poetry as well as their keen awareness of their use of language in ‘exile’ that make Marot and Du Bellay particularly useful to examine in tandem.

We will examine the *Regrets* rather than other pieces of Du Bellay’s work because here we see a definitive switch in the poet’s linguistic awareness, and here we can anchor our argument that the poet’s so-called ‘exile’ in Rome and his distance from his native tongue causes him to change his tune in using vernacular sources in his own poetry. Significantly, Du Bellay writes about using a specific language (e.g. French, Latin, etc.) in his own verse more times in the *Regrets* than in any of his other poetic collections. And, while this alone is not enough to make any major claims

¹¹⁶ See Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration*, 120.

about what the author is actually thinking about the vernacular, or how he is actually using it, it is important to note that at the same time that the author is making commentary about his exiled linguistic situation, he also makes a conscious decision to move to native, 'French' models of poetry, such as we see in his decidedly Maroticized *Divers Jeux Rustiques*.

Upon examining the style and subject matter of Du Bellay's major poetic collections, one might assume that he composed the *Antiquitez de Rome* first, just after arriving in the city to work for his cousin, the Cardinal Jean Du Bellay, and then moved on to write the *Regrets* later during his stay, after the city had lost its luster for him. Then, one might assume that, with all the pastoral scenery and regional references to Anjou, the *Divers Jeux Rustiques* were composed upon his return to his home country. In reality, all three of these collections were published roughly concurrently in 1558; as Du Bellay didn't leave Rome until September of 1557, it is reasonable to conjecture that the composition of all three of these collections took place, for the most part, in Italy.¹¹⁷

While each of the three collections vary quite drastically in subject matter, it is important to note the common thread binds them all together;

¹¹⁷ In fact, we only have evidence for the very last of the sonnets of the *Regrets* as composed upon Du Bellay's return to France. This is anchored by the fact that the subject matter of the pieces turns from the Italian court to the French court, as well as a renewal of *obeissance* to the French Crown. For more on the chronology of these three collections, see Aris and Joukovsky's introduction to Tome II of the *Oeuvres poétiques*, X-XI.

Du Bellay's tendency to wax poetic about his homeland, and to appropriate the events and characters of the Italian city around him into a French context. This manifests his imitative theory as laid out in the *Deffence*, but it also points to a deep rooted nostalgia for France—as Margaret Ferguson notes, these works “might be bound together with the general title, *Patriae desiderium*.”¹¹⁸ The longer the poet is away from France, the more he desires the things around him to be ‘French,’ and he attempts to make them so through his poetry.

In the *Antiquitez de Rome*, for example, in the much cited sonnet XXX, “Comme le champ semé en verdure foisonne,” Du Bellay juxtaposes an image of lush fields in the French countryside with that of Roman ruins, comparing the pillage of the ruins with the actions of the gleaners in the field. As the gleaner strips the once lush agricultural bounty down to nothing, so do the pillagers to the archeological bounties of Rome:

Ainsi de peu à peu creut l'Empire Romain,
Tant qu'il fut despouillé par la Barbare main,
Qui ne laissa de luy que ces marques antiques,
Que chacun va pillant : comme on void le gleneur

¹¹⁸ *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defences of Poetry*, 50.

Cheminant pas à pas recueillir les reliques
De ce qui va tumbant apres le moissonneur.¹¹⁹

As such, little by little the Roman Empire grew,
Until it was stripped by the barbaric hand,
Which only left of it these antique tokens,
That everyone goes about pillaging: such as we see the gleaner
Walking step by step to pick up the remains
Of that which falls after the harvester.

This image of gleaning not only speaks to a sentiment of regret as Du Bellay regards the vanquished Roman ruins around him, but is also very much representative of how he operates as a scholar and poet. Just as he gleaned bits and (quite large) pieces of Speroni's *Dialogo* to put together his *Deffence*, his imitative writing technique is very much the amalgamation of the style and thoughts—"marques antiques," as it were—of predecessor poets, both French and "barbare." Furthermore, Du Bellay picks up on the theme of conflating old with modern and extends it in geographic terms. In the *Jeux rustiques*, the conflation of foreign and native elements occurs through

¹¹⁹ Lines 9-14.

the appropriation of French toponyms to a mythological landscape; while the insistence on the “terre angevine” and the fertile Loire River is not as pronounced as we see in the *Olive*, the native presence in the *Jeux* is still palpable. For instance, in the series IV through VI, “A Ceres, à Bacchus et à Palès, “Sur le mesme sujet,” and “D’un berger, à Pan,” the *vignobles* of Mythology are transported into the Angevine countryside, with Du Bellay singing the accolades of the fertile wine producing region. Not even the vineyards of the gods can compare with the productivity of those of Anjou, with its lands so infinitely bountiful:

Faucheurs, coupeurs, vandangeurs, louez doncques
Le pré, le champ, le vignoble Angevin:
Granges, greniers, celiers on ne vid onques
Si pleins de fein, de froument, et de vin.¹²⁰

Mowers, reapers, vintners, praise thus
The Angevine meadow, field, vineyard:
Granges, attics, cellars, you’ll never see
So full of hay, of wheat, and of wine.

¹²⁰ Lines 11-14.

Despite being surrounded by the grandeur of the Roman city and all its history, Du Bellay is less inspired by Italy than he is by his homeland, and his verse composed in Italy reveals a deep-seated nostalgia for France. Even in a collection with such an explicitly foreign subject matter such as the *Antiquitez*, we still see strong evidence of this homesickness with an abundance of French references and use of regional imagery.

In order to better understand Du Bellay's poetic and linguistic evolution in this context of native sources, we need to turn first to that collection which is the farthest away in subject and form from what Du Bellay extols in the *Deffence*, the *Jeux rustiques*. After such a conventional poetic endeavor as the *Olive*, Du Bellay's attempt at a collection of somewhat 'lofty' Petrarchan-influenced love poems published roughly concurrently with his *Deffence*, and after the melancholic, bittersweet themes in the *Antiquitez* and the *Regrets*, it is surprising to read his *Divers Jeux Rustiques*; at first glance, it seems to be almost the opposite of Du Bellay's earlier works, a "cheerful miscellany," as L. Clark Keating labels it,¹²¹ and not at all the corpus we would expect from the author of the *Deffence*, who was so critical of the very 'low style' and 'simple language' that the collection is teeming

¹²¹ *Joachim du Bellay*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971), 98.

with. In fact, from poetic forms to subject matter, the *Divers Jeux* collection is tremendously light-hearted and free-spirited in manner. The author himself explains this changed attitude in the *Au Lecteur* section of the *Jeux*, which, with its mentions of ‘games,’ ‘banquets,’ and “voluptez,” sounds to be more Rabelaisian than Du Bellaysian in spirit;

Reçoy donques ce present, tel qu’il est, de la mesme volonté que je te le présente: employant les mesmes heures à la lecture d’iceluy, que celles que j’ay employees à la composition : c’est le temps qu’on donne ordinairement au jeu, aux spectacles, aux banquetz, et autres telles voluptez de plus grands fraiz, et bien souvent de moindre plaisir...¹²²

Receive thus this gift, as it is, with the same humor with which I present it to you: using the same hours to read this as I used to write it: that is, the time which we ordinarily put aside for games, for spectacles, for banquets and other such pleasures of greater expense, and very often of lesser enjoyment...

¹²² *Oeuvres poétiques*, 144.

Du Bellay then goes on to warn his audience that if it is something more serious and erudite from this collection, it ought to take a look at the title, which should provide it with sufficient warning not to proceed any further; instead, it should read others of Du Bellay's oeuvres, "plus dignes d'eux" (more worthy of them). Although Du Bellay is prepared to delve into some less serious, seemingly insubstantial conventions in *Les Divers Jeux* for his own creative amusement, he doesn't consider them to be of the highest quality for his serious readers.

For a poet who was so set on leaving the 'low styles' of poetry of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance behind, the poetic forms of the *Divers Jeux* are missing evidence of a 'high style.' As Saulnier notes in his introduction to the collection, the "petits genres" are much more abundant than the "nobles" ones; according to his count, there are nine *odelettes* and six *chants* in the collection, and the blazon form even appears under the guise of "épithètes plaisantes."¹²³ Moreover, as he remarks, not only does virtually the entire range of typical Marotic forms turn up in the *Divers Jeux*, but if we look at Thomas Sebillet's *Art Poétique*, which was in principle a counter-*Deffence* in that it established Marot as a model to be imitated, rather than shunned, we find that Du Bellay has essentially set up the perfect example

¹²³ *Oeuvres poétiques*, XLIV.

of Marotism ‘Sebilletique’; “qu’on reprenne l’Art Poétique....ce bilan du marotisme....on en trouvera la théorie, pour la plupart”¹²⁴ (if we take the *Art Poétique*....this general report of Maroticism....we discover [in it] the [entire] theory, for the most part).

But if the *Jeux Rustiques* represents a return to native sources in terms of providing clues to the poet’s relationship with his native vernacular, it turns up very little evidence. France is extolled, poets such as Magny are praised for doing justice to the French language in their verse, but beyond commonplace laudations, we see little evidence that Du Bellay is thinking about the vernacular. For this, we must turn to Du Bellay’s other poetic creations written in Rome. In fact, perhaps some of the most unexpected comparisons we can make between Marot and Du Bellay are found in some of both authors’ most serious works—Marot’s *Epistres*, especially those from exile, and Du Bellay’s *Regrets*.

This is not the first time that the significance of language has been highlighted in Du Bellay’s Roman poetry. Demerson’s two-volume Latin supplement to Chamard’s edition of Du Bellay’s *Oeuvres*¹²⁵ is an essential scholarly work that brings to light Du Bellay’s aspirations as a Latin poet, rather than just comment on his French poetry, as previous editions had

¹²⁴ Saulnier, in Du Bellay, *Oeuvres poétiques*, XLV.

¹²⁵ Joachim Du Bellay, *Œuvres Poétiques: Viii*, edited by Geneviève Demerson (Paris: Société des textes français modernes, 1985).

done. Additionally, Tucker explores Du Bellay's "literary bilingualism," especially in the *Antiquitez*, in his work, *The Poet's Odyssey*.¹²⁶ While I believe that Tucker's work on Du Bellay's literary bilingualism is seminal in understanding the poet's relationship with foreign and native sources in constructing the—often interconnected—French *and* Latin poetry of his Roman collection, I will take a different approach in my own work. Instead of focusing on Du Bellay's use of Classical authors as inspiration for his Roman poetry, I will be looking at the influence of one particular vernacular poet, Marot, as a pivotal influence Du Bellay in his Roman poetry composed in French, especially the *Regrets*.

The *Regrets* starts off on a very Marotic note, with the negating statements of Du Bellay linking back to similar formulations in Marot's *Epitres*. In Sonnet 1 of the *Regrets*, the aging Du Bellay speaks of growing tired of trying to find a 'higher inspiration' in writing his verses, and instead seeks to write them after his own, natural inclination;

Je ne veulx point fouiller au sein de la nature,
Je ne veulx point chercher l'esprit de l'univers,
Je ne veulx point sonder les abysms couvers,

¹²⁶ See especially 12-16.

Ni dessigner du ciel la belle architecture.
Je ne peins mes tableaux de si riche peinture,
Et si haults arguments ne recherches à mes vers:
Mais suivant de ce lieu les accidents divers,
Soit de bien, soit de mal, j'escris à l'aventure.¹²⁷

I don't want to grope for the depths of nature,
I don't want to look for the spirit of the universe,
I don't want to sound the secret depths,
Nor draw the beautiful architecture of heaven.
I don't paint my pictures with such rich description;
And I don't seek such lofty subjects in my verse:
Rather, following diverse misfortunes from this place,
For better or for worse, I write haphazardly.

Du Bellay likens the use of lofty language and exotic themes in his poetry with the actions of seeking, linking it with verbs like “fouiller,” “chercher,” and sonder,” all of which point to laborious, exploratory actions. The change in the poet's style from complicated and constructed to simple and

¹²⁷ Lines 1-8.

un-researched is attributed to his various misfortunes in Italy—“suivant de ce lieu les accidents divers”—and linked with the notion of ‘haphazardness.’ All of this, in turn, is linked back to native sources via Marot, who we have established as an imitative source for this piece. Du Bellay’s ‘je ne veux pas’ formulation, according to Defaux, echoes Marot’s “Epistre à son amy Lyon” where the author sets up the premise for his famous fable of the lion and the rat;

Je ne t’escry de l’amour vaine et folle:

Tu voys assez s’elle sert ou affolle;

Je ne t’escry ne d’armes ne de guerre:

Tu voys qui peult bien ou mal y acquerre;

Je ne t’escry de fortune puissante:

Tu voys assez s’elle est ferme et glissante ;

Je ne t’escry d’abus trop abusant:

Tu en sçais prou et si n’en vas usant ;

Je ne t’escry de Dieu ne sa puissance:

C’est à lui seul t’en donner congnoissance...¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Lines 1-10.

I don't write you about vain and foolish love:
You see enough if it helps or if it makes you crazy:
I don't write you about weapons or war :
You see what good or bad can come from that:
I don't write you about powerful fortune:
You see enough if it is strong and smooth ;
I don't write you about over-abusing abuse:
You see enough but keep using it:
I don't write you about God or his power:
It's to him alone that you owe recognition....

Composed while the author was imprisoned in Châtelet, and using the fable as a model for his epistle, Marot takes the role of the rat seeking help from the lion (his friend and the person to whom the letter was addressed, Saigon). Instead of sending a direct cry for help, Marot expresses a sentiment of distress and helplessness by stating with the negative “Je ne t’escry pas” that decrying past and present wrongs is exactly what he will *not* do, thus cleverly bringing attention to them by proxy. He shrewdly states that his friend and interlocutor, Saigon must already know about these things, so he will not repeat them, but by saying so, he draws attention to

those very problems.

Later in the *Regrets*, Du Bellay will follow his “je ne veux” formulation with one which has even more definite echoes of Marot, replacing the “je ne t’escry” with a listing of indistinguishable “je n’escris” in LXXIX. With the election of this “escris” formulation, Du Bellay not only gives a nod in the direction of Marot’s epistle from exile, but both men also play with the similarity of the verb “escrire” (to write) to “escrier” (to call out, exclaim). Since both pieces are epistolary in nature, this is significant in that, in the action of writing, Marot and Du Bellay are also confessing, and ‘exclaiming’ their hardships from ‘exile.’ The main differentiation between the two poems, however, is that where Marot’s suffering and imprisonment was very real, Du Bellay’s is very much psychological, and entirely of his own doing. In his list, Du Bellay laments the lack of love, pleasure, riches, friendship, and everything else he had to leave behind in order to come to Rome, which seems to leave him with very restricted subject matter to address in his poems:

Je n’escris point d’amour, n’estant point amoureux,

Je n’escris de beauté, n’ayant belle maistresse,

Je n’escris de douceur, n’esprouvant que rudesse,

Je n'escris de plaisir, me trouvant malheureux,
Je n'escris de faveur, ne voyant ma Princesse,
Je n'escris de tresors, n'ayant point de richesse,
Je n'escris de santé, me sentant langoureux.
Je n'escris de la court, estant loing de mon Prince,
Je n'escris de la France, en estrange province,
Je n'escris de l'honneur, n'en voyant point icy.
Je n'escris d'amitié, ne trouvant que feintise,
Je n'escris de vertu, n'en trouvant point aussi,
Je n'escris de sçavoir, entre les gens d'Eglise.

I don't write about love, being not in love,
I don't write about beauty, having no beautiful mistress,
I don't write about sweetness, feeling only harshness,
I don't write about pleasure, feeling unhappy,
I don't write about favor, not seeing my princess,
I don't write about treasures, not having any wealth,
I don't write about health, failing in strength.
I don't write about the Court, being far away from my prince,
I don't write about France, being in a strange land,

I don't write about honor, not seeing any here.

I don't write about friendship, only finding hypocrisy,

I don't write about virtue, not seeing any of that either.

I don't write about wisdom, in the company of men of the Church.

As Gérard Defaux conjectures, the negation here for both authors may correspond to a desire to distance themselves from their poetic pasts; “c’est une volonté proclamée de prendre ses distances, de se situer par rapport à un modèle menaçant, à une tradition dont on ne veut plus”¹²⁹ (it’s a proclaimed desire to distance oneself, to situate oneself vis-à-vis a menacing model, towards a tradition which is no longer desired). Marot, therefore, may be trying to distance himself from the restricted subject matters and poetic styles of the *Grands Rhétoriciens*, just as Du Bellay denounces any former high-order petrarchization and embellishment of his verses, but instead, wishes for them to be “les plus seurs secretaires” of his own, true feelings and lamentations. Furthermore, Du Bellay’s “je n’escris” formulations, which span across all of the themes of his previous poetic endeavors—the love poetry of the *Olive*, the “plaisir” and “bonheur” of the

¹²⁹ “Clément Marot: Une Poétique du silence et de la liberté,” in *Pre-Pléiade Poetry* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1985), 48.

Jeux, etc.—point to the fact that, due to his unhappy situation in Rome, even if he wished to, it is impossible at this point for him to return to his previous poetic stylings, because his life is now devoid of any of the native, French things that could inspire him to write such verse. Failing in health and miserable in psyche, Du Bellay feels totally separated from his native soil and poetic Muses, and is unable to write about anything except the negativity that he senses. Remarkably, where Marot cleverly drew attention to adverse situations in his poem by stating his confidence that his confidant is already aware of them, so he needn't address them directly, Du Bellay's poem is utterly personal; there is no "tu" to absorb and/or reflect any of the negative feelings, which are entirely his own, and being alone, he must suffer entirely. Whatever the formulation may be reminiscent of, the negative phrasing of his poetics is so similar to Marot's that we must establish the Grand Rhétoriqueur as a source for Du Bellay here; moreover, for both authors, this formulation will set up an analogous tone of negativity that will echo throughout both collections, and point to a deep-set homesickness and nostalgia for France.

In his *Regrets*, Du Bellay laments many unfortunate circumstances—abandonment by his poetic 'Muse,' old age, and most notably, being far away from his home country. His station in Rome, is, as Du Bellay portrays it in

his verses, essentially an exile. As Droz notes in his introduction to *Les Antiquitez et les Regrets*;

La joie que du Bellay avait ressentie en arrivant à Rome, en contemplant ces ruines grandioses, en foulant la terre où les grands hommes de l'antiquité avaient vécu, cette joie fut passagère. Quelques mois, peut-être une année après son arrivée, le charme est rompu, le mirage dissipé et il ne reste au poète que des Regrets....Tout n'est qu'amertume, que le poète ressent vivement et avoue sans vergogne.¹³⁰

The joy that Du Bellay had felt arriving in Rome, thinking about these grandiose ruins, grazing the earth where the great men of Antiquity had lived, this joy was fleeting. A few months, maybe one year after his arrival, the charm was broken, the mirage vanished and the only thing left for the poet was the *Regrets*....Everything is bitterness, which the poet feels deeply and acknowledges without shame.

¹³⁰ Du Bellay, *Les antiquitez de Rome et Les regrets*, Edited by E. Droz (Paris: Droz, 1945), XII-XIII.

With the theme of exile in Du Bellay, there is no better comparison than Marot, whom Timothy Hampton names, along with Charles d'Orléans,¹³¹ as one of the “great predecessor ‘exile’ poets”¹³² to Du Bellay. Marot lived on one flight after another; even his childhood unfolded in exile, as he followed his poet-father to the court of Anne de Bretagne at an early age, later moving to various other courts in France and Italy during his own poetic career¹³³ Marot endured several imprisonments during his lifetime for random crimes alleged against him by Catholic adversaries, and these imprisonments constituted ‘exiles’ of their own right. In *L'Enfer*, which he wrote during one of his terms of imprisonment, Marot speaks of the commencement of his exiled life, as he left his native Cahors en Quercy to join the French court. Not only did the poet leave his mother and hometown behind, but he abandoned his maternal dialect in order to learn the French of the court:

...Car une matinée

N'ayant dix ans en France fuz mené:

Là, où depuis me suis tant pourmené,

¹³¹ Though Du Bellay knew none of Orléans' work, as it remained unpublished in his lifetime.

¹³² *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century: Inventing Renaissance France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 127.

¹³³ See Defaux's “Introduction,” *Œuvres Poétiques I*.

Que j'oubliay ma langue maternelle,
Et grossement apprins la paternelle
Langue Françoise es grands Courts estimée¹³⁴

...Because one morning
Being not yet ten years old was brought to France,
There, where since I have spent so much time,
That I forgot my mother tongue,
And rudely learned the father tongue
The French Language so esteemed at the great courts.

Later, during his exile in Venice, Marot will again have to shift tongues, this time to Italian, a change that he lamented in his “*Epistre à la royne de Navarre*”. In it, he excuses himself to the queen, for if she finds any unanticipated change in his poetic style, she must credit it to the fact that he is being overexposed to the Italian language: “*Pardonne moy: c’est mon stile qui change, / Par trop oyr parler langage estrange*”¹³⁵ (Pardon me: it’s my style that changes,/ Because I’ve been hearing too much foreign language).

We might note here that Du Bellay, too, had to desert his native

¹³⁴ Lines 398-403.

¹³⁵ Lines 193-194.

French language during his exile in Rome and adopt the indigenous Italian, which, as E. Droz notes, fortunately he spoke well, as well as Latin, which was still the *de facto* language of the humanists, and indeed, of the Church, in Rome.¹³⁶ In Rome, Du Bellay also left French aside for a time by composing an entire collection, the *Poemata*, in Latin. Ironically enough, when Marot abandoned his maternal, regional dialect to write French because of his ‘exile’ to the French court, and then later is forced to use Italian during his exile in Italy, Du Bellay, the advocate of the French vernacular, follows a somewhat backwards linguistic progression, and left his native French environment for Latin (and secondarily, Italian). For Du Bellay like Marot, this change in language bears effects upon his poetry; he refers to the vernacular in six separate poems in the *Regrets*—X, XVIII, XXII, XCV, LXXXVI and CLXXXVII¹³⁷—versus only once in the *Divers Jeux Rustiques*,¹³⁸ and not at all in the *Antiquitez*. This is significant because the *Regrets* is also the most personal and *confessional* of Du Bellay’s poetic collections; Du Bellay reflects and complains about much in his current situation in Rome, and it is evident that he is effected—if not troubled—by not being able to communicate in his native language; neither on a quotidian

¹³⁶ See Droz’s introduction, *Les antiquitez de Rome et Les regrets*, XVIII.

¹³⁷ It is also mentioned more indirectly in LVIII, XC, CXLVIII, and CLVII.

¹³⁸ In « A Olivier de Magni sur les perfections de sa dame. » The only other linguistic mention of note in the collection is in XXIX, “Epitaphe de l’Abbé Bonnet,” where the ridiculous monk figure is made fun of for his use of Latin.

basis nor in his written work, a circumstance reflected by his relinquishing of the French language for the *Poemata*.

The most telling of these poems about language in the *Regrets* in our understanding of Du Bellay's own evolving relationship with the vernacular are X and XVIII, in which Du Bellay dialogues with Ronsard and Jean de Morel about his regrets over how living in Rome has forced him to communicate in Latin. In X, for example, we read

Ce n'est le fleuve Thusque au superbe rivage,
Ce n'est l'air des Latins ny le mont Palatin,
Qui ores (mon Ronsard) me fait parler Latin,
Changeant à l'estranger mon naturel langage:
C'est l'ennuy de me voir trois ans et d'avantage,
Ainsi qu'un Prométhé, cloué sur l'Aventin,
Où l'espoir miserable et mon cruel destin,
Non le joug amoureux, me detient en servage.
Et quoy (Ronsard) et quoy, si au bord estrange
Ovide osa sa langue en barbare changer
Afin d'estre entendu, qui me pourra reprendre
D'un change plus heureux ? nul, puis que le François,

Quoy qu'au Grec et Romain égalé tu te sois,
Au rivage Latin ne se peult faire entendre.¹³⁹

It's not the superb banks of the Tuscan river
It's not the Roman air, nor the Palatine Hill
Which now (my Ronsard) makes me speak Latin,
Changing my natural language for a foreign one:
It's the discontent of seeing myself for more than three years,
Like a Prometheus, bound to the Aventine [hill],
Where miserable hope and my cruel destiny,
Not the yoke of love, binds me in servitude.
And what (Ronsard) and what, if far abroad
Ovid had dared to change his language to the barbaric form
In order to be heard, who could reprimand me
For a more fortunate change?
No one, since French,
Even though you have equaled [your verse in it] to Greek and
Roman,
Isn't heard on the Roman shores.

¹³⁹ Lines 1-14.

Here, we see Du Bellay the poet struggle with the realities of his linguistic situation. Whereas Ovid and Ronsard are free to write in their native tongues and still be appreciated by his audiences wherever they might be, Du Bellay is forced by circumstance to convert to Latin as a necessity to professional preservation. It is curious that Du Bellay picks Prometheus, the Greek character punished by Zeus for having challenged the mortal's omnipotence and stolen fire; it is as if the poet is comparing his previous lofty goals for and work on the vernacular to challenging the supremacy of the Gods, and for punishment he has now been displaced to Rome and 'forced' to write in a foreign tongue. He views himself as bound in chains to Rome, and to foreign tongues, as he considers himself no longer 'free' to write in his native French.

In XVIII, moreover, we read of the poet making fun of his situation, guessing what the reaction of his friend, Morel, will be upon hearing that Du Bellay has abandoned the vernacular for Latin:

Si tu ne sçais (Morel) ce que je fais icy,
Je ne fais pas l'amour, ny autre tel ouvrage:
Je courtise mon maistre, et si fais d'avantage,

Ayant de sa maison le principal soucy.
Mon Dieu (ce diras tu) quel miracle est-ce cy,
Que de veoir, Dubellay se mesler du mesnage,
Et composer des vers en un autre langage !
Les loups, et les aigneaux s'accordent tout ainsi.
Voilà que c'est (Morel) la doulce poësie
M'accompagne par tout, sans qu'autre fantaisie
En si plaisant labeur me puisse rendre oisif.
Mais tu me respondras : donne, si tu es sage,
De bonne heure congé au cheval qui est d'aage,
De peur qu'il ne s'empire, et devienne poussif.¹⁴⁰

If you don't know (Morel) what I'm doing here,
I'm not making love, nor any other sort of work:
I court my master, and do so so much,
Having his house as my principal worry.
My God (you will say) what kind of miracle is this,
To see Du Bellay dealing with housekeeping,
And composing verse in another language!

¹⁴⁰ Lines 1-14.

The wolf and lamb dwell together as such.
That's what it is (Morel) that the sweet poetry
Accompanies me everywhere, without any other conceit
In such pleasant labor I can become lazy.
But you shall tell me: give it to me, if you're wise,
An early break for the horse that is of [old] age,
For fear that he worsens, and becomes short-winded.

Here, Du Bellay uses old age and weariness as an excuse for writing poetry in Latin, somewhat contradicting what he wrote in the previous poem sonnet addressed to Ronsard. It is important to note that in both of these sonnets, Du Bellay feels the necessity to *excuse* himself to his French compatriots for having strayed from their native vernacular in his poetry, hinting at some onus felt on his part for having abandoned French for Latin. However, he also points to the fact that writing this Latin verse provides him some respite, and asks his friends to take pity on an old man who has so little comfort in his present situation. It is peculiar that he should include these excuses in the *Regrets*, as in the *Poemata*, he never actually explains his reasoning for having composed the collection in Latin. Instead, in his “Ad Lectorum” address to the *Poemata*, he simply—and rather haughtily—

remarks, “la muse française est pour moi, je l’avoue, ce qu’est l’épouse pour son mari ; c’est comme maitresse que j’entoure de mes soins la Muse latine » (the French muse for me is, I admit, like the wife is to her husband ; it’s as a mistress that I surround myself with the care of the Latin muse).

Philippe Desan conjectures that if Du Bellay only sees Latin as a ‘mistress’ and French as his ‘wife’, he doesn’t feel like he is breaking any rules by using Latin in a manner so totally contrary to his ideas as set forth in the *Deffence*.¹⁴¹ But this again seems like a fairly paltry excuse for breaking one of the poet’s most cardinal rules in poetic composition—to use the vernacular in every circumstance. It is an odd formulation, furthermore, because it hints that Du Bellay feels some sort of legal and moral obligation to French—the relationship between man and wife is indeed legally and morally binding—but that he has reached a state of depravity to where he is willing to ‘cheat’ on French (his wife) to reap the carnal pleasures of Latin (his mistress). While I believe that Desan’s analysis might be oversimplified, this passage is significant in that it points to a deep-seated anxiety over language choice in the poet’s oeuvre, and a definite rivalry between French and Latin—two constantly conflicted languages—in the author’s mind.

For Du Bellay, the longing to get back to France dominates the

¹⁴¹ “De la poésie de circonstance à la satire: Du Bellay et l’engagement poétique,” in *Du Bellay* (Angers: Presse de l’Université d’Angers, 1990), 428.

Regrets. Everything about Rome becomes unbearable, with a homecoming cited as the only remedy to his suffering; even then, the cure is not sure, as the poet complains about his old age, and the possibility of never having the chance to return home. In XXV, the poet laments ever having left his home country and his beloved Anjou;

Malheureux l'an, le mois, le jour, l'heure, et le point,
Et malheureuse soit la flateuse esperance,
Quand pour venire icy j'abandonnay la France,
La France, et mon Anjou, dont le desir me point¹⁴²

Unhappy the year, the month, the hour, and the minute,
And unhappy be the pleasurable hope,
When to come here I abandoned France,
France, and my Anjou, which I long for so much it pierces me.

The most painful part of exile for Du Bellay is that he realizes that the disappointment results from his own doing ; as he notes in XXXII, having left for Rome with the lofty intentions of becoming « sçavant en la

¹⁴² Lines 1-4.

philosophie/ en la mathematique et medicine aussi”¹⁴³ (‘wise in Philosophy, Math, and Medicine, too’), the poet is instead faced with boredom and wasted time, working a menial position as a “mesnagier” (‘house-husband’) assigned to him by his seemingly indifferent cousin.

Not surprisingly, the character that both Marot and Du Bellay use to exemplify the languishing voyager far from home is Ulysses. Thus in Marot’s Epistle XVII « A la royne de Navarre » we read;

...ung chascun pour tout seur
Trouve tousjours ne sçay quelle douceur
En son pays, qui ne luy vault permectre
De le povoir en oubliance mectre.
Ulixes sage...
Fit bien jadis refuz d’estre immortel
Pour retourner en sa maison petite,
Et du regret de mort se disoit quitte
Si l’air eust pu de son pays humer
et veu de loing son vilage fumer.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Lines 1-2.

¹⁴⁴ Lines 153-162.

...everyone for certain

Always finds I don't know what sweetness

In his country, which won't allow him

To be able to forget it.

Sage Ulysses...

Of old refused immortality

In order to return to his little house,

And proclaimed himself freed of the fear of death

If he would be able to breathe the air of his country

and see from afar the [chimney] smoke from his village.

The capacity to return to France after exile is a sweetness greater than immortality. Marot, who is forced to roam due to professional and religious circumstance, likens his wandering to Ulysses,' and like Ulysses, for him there is no greater prize than being able to go home. Importantly, though, Marot does not directly link himself to Ulysses, but skillfully includes the mythological reference so that his audience may make the connection on its own. Following, in Du Bellay's sonnets XXXI and CXXX, we read almost the same sentiments, but here the poet does compare himself directly to

Ulysses—“Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage”¹⁴⁵ (Happy he who, like Ulysses, traveled far)—and waxing poetic about smoking chimneys in his quaint former abode, fearing that he may never see his homeland again;

Et je pensois aussi ce que pensoit Ulysse,
Qu’il n’estoit rien plus doux que voir encor’ un jour
Fumer sa cheminee, et apres long sejour
Se retrouver au sein de sa terre nourrice. (lines 1-4)

And I also thought what Ulysses thought,
That there wasn’t anything sweeter than to one day again see
The smoke from his chimney, and after a long stay
Finds himself at the heart of his mother land.

The theme of Ulysses appears yet again in sonnet LXXXVIII, where the poet regrets having been linked with this relentlessly wandering legend;

Qui choisira pour moy la racine d’Ulysse?

¹⁴⁵ Line 1.

Et qui me gardera de tomber au danger
Qu'une Circe en pourceau ne me puisse changer
Pour estre à tout jamais fait esclave du vice ?¹⁴⁶

Who will choose for me the root of Ulysses?
And who will keep me from falling in danger
So that a Circe can't turn me into a pig
To be forever more a slave of vice?

While for Marot, the comparison with Ulysses may be a suitable one, as both men were condemned by outside forces to wander, Du Bellay's self-comparison to the ancient hero comes off as a bit of an overstatement—after all, as he admits through his verse, it was he who “abandonnay la France” of his own volition. Furthermore, it is important to note that, while Marot never directly compares himself to Ulysses, but includes the legend as a subtle, albeit poignant reference, Du Bellay elects this comparison for himself; indeed, it is he who elected the “racine d'Ulysse,” both in the literal sense of making the decision to follow his cousin to Italy, as well as in the figurative sense of choosing this character as a literary doppelganger! Du

¹⁴⁶ Lines 1-4.

Bellay's exile, however, must be considered in a more psychological light; whereas Marot was in actual, physical, political exile, Du Bellay's exile is felt mentally, as he is away from his literary circle in France and unable to do the mentally stimulating work he holds so dear.

One theme that runs clearly through both Marot's exile epistles and Du Bellay's *Regrets* as well is that of desertion of the home country, and more specifically, abandonment by compatriots as punishment for crimes not committed. In Marot, anger at abandonment by his country fellows is expressed quite clearly in his "Epistre au roy, du temps de son exil à Ferrare." In this piece, Marot essentially apologizes to the king for fleeing France for Ferrara¹⁴⁷, but he also makes clear that those truly at blame are his compatriots, who he feels have unjustly abandoned him:

J'abandonnay sans avoir commys crime

L'ingrate France, ingrate ingratissime

A son Poëte: et en le delaissant,

Fort grand regret mon cueur blessant.¹⁴⁸

I abandoned without having committed any crime

¹⁴⁷ Apparently the king was furious at Marot for having fled without notification.

¹⁴⁸ Lines 192-194.

Ungrateful France, most ungrateful ingrate

To her poet: and in leaving her

A great sorrow injured my heart

While Marot takes the blame for leaving France, he also recognizes that he does not merit the punishment of banishment. Instead, the indifference of his fellow French citizens drove him to this extreme. Their lack of appreciation—an enormous ingratitude that Marot angrily emphasizes not only through repetition of that noun, but also reformulates in an ultimately superlative “*ingratisime*”—to a poet who devoted so much of his professional life to his *patrie*, is what pains him more than the exile itself.

While Du Bellay was doubtlessly more in control of his own exile in Rome—as an aristocrat who had fixed means independent of his volunteer work, he did not have to earn a livelihood by devoting his life to his *patrie*—he nonetheless expresses similar sentiments to Marot’s of abandonment. However, for him, it is not his country fellows, but his inspirational “Muses” who have abandoned him in Rome, leaving him to languish in a desert of poetic motivation. He laments this loss of poetic inspiration in, for example, VI:

Ceste divine ardeur,
Je ne l'ay plus aussi,
Et les Muses de moy, comme estranges, s'enfuyent.¹⁴⁹

This divine ardeur,
I have no more either,
And my muses, like strangers, fly away

Furthermore, just as Marot expresses resentment at the undue punishment of exile, Du Bellay questions why he, an honest poet “né pour la Muse”¹⁵⁰ (born for the muse) should be condemned to a lowly and boring existence as a “mesnagier” (householder). In XLIII, furthermore, he, like Marot, points out that he has committed no crime to merit the misery he currently lives in:

Je ne commis jamais fraude ne malefice,
Je ne doutay jamais des poincts de nostre foy,
Je n'ay point violé l'ordonnance du roy,
Et n'ay point esprouvé la rigueur de justice.
J'ay fait à mon seigneur fidelement service,

¹⁴⁹ Lines 13-14.

¹⁵⁰ XXXIX, line 13.

Je fais pour mes amis ce que je puis et doy....Voilà que je suis.
Et toutefois...comme un qui est aux dieux et aux hommes
haineux,
Le malheur me poursuit et tousjours m'importune.¹⁵¹

I never committed fraud or mischief,
I never doubted the articles of our faith,
I never violated the King's orders,
And never suffered thereof the punishments of justice
I served my lord loyally,
I do for my friends all that I can and must....This is what I am.
And nonetheless...like someone hated by gods and men alike,
Unhappiness follows me and troubles me.

Du Bellay, who once dreamed of the poetic inspiration that life in the holy capital might hold in store, and is instead disgusted by a regime of lust, greed, and hypocrisy, lets all of his disappointment and antipathy free in the *Regrets*. Gone is the naive Joachim who ambitiously pursues his 'holy' cousin into Rome, seeking poetic inspiration in the famous city. Instead, in the last

¹⁵¹ Lines 1-11.

of his poetic collections written in Rome to be published, the *Regrets* displays a much different Du Bellay, that of a poet tired of the wicked duplicity of the world around him, a poet ready to give up past endeavors to imitate others, to essentially ‘be’ a poet whom he is not, and instead embrace his own disobedient voice, and write with his own, unembellished words, of true, natural—and native—sources of inspiration. Addressing it to the French poet (and, not coincidentally, translator of Homer) Lancelot de Carle, in Sonnet 128, the first poem of the cycle upon his return to France, Du Bellay extends the Ulysses metaphor to a more general one of being lost at sea:

Ce n'est pas de mon gré (Carle) que ma navire
Erre en la mer Tyrrhene : un vent impetueux
La chasse maulgré moy par ces flots tortueux,
Ne voiant plus le pol, qui sa faveur t'inspire
Je ne voy que roches, et si rien se peult dire
Pire que des rochers le hurt audacieux :
Et le phare jadis favorable à mes jeux
De mon cours egaré sa lanterne retire.
Mais si je puis un jour me sauver des dangers
Que je fuy vagabond par ces flots estrangers,

Et voir de l'Océan les campagnes humides,
J'arresterais ma nef au rivage Gaulois,
Consacrant ma dépouille au Neptune François,
A Glauque, à Melicerte, et aux sœurs Néréïdes.¹⁵²

It's not of my own accord (Carle) that my ship
Floats in the Tyrrhenian Sea: an impetuous wind
Chases it with these torturous waves despite me,
No longer seeing the pole, which inspires your grace
I only see rocks, and whatever can be called
Worse than the audacious encounter with the rocks:
And the lighthouse which once showed me its favor
Turns its light away from my misled course.
But if I can one day save myself from the dangers
Which I flee hither and thither by these foreign waves,
And can find the liquid ocean fields,
I'll stop my ship on the Gallic shores
Consecrating my spoils to the French Neptune,
To Glaucus, Melicertes, and the Nereides sisters.

¹⁵² Lines 1-14.

The sentiment here changes from one of general homesickness to being lost—"égaré"—entirely. Beginning his journey back to France, Du Bellay writes of the dangers he must overcome. The first half of the poem focuses on perilous images, with 'torturous' swells and jutting rock formations; all of these are linked with the theme of 'foreignness' with the inclusion that all of this is happening while the author tries hopelessly to save himself from foreign dangers, as identified in the "flots étrangers." Juxtaposed with the theme of overseas danger at the end of the poem, however, is the image of French soil, which is linked with the idea of 'salvation' with the reference to the sea nymphs of mythology. It is striking that, in this piece, as Du Bellay's poetic references become more foreign—that is, as he delves more into the classical/mythological—he is thinking more about France. As the *Regrets* come to an end, this juxtaposition of foreign peril with native salvation will become all the more telling, as Du Bellay begins to gravitate more and more towards the native and the familiar, to finally leave the foreign behind altogether.

In the end, while Du Bellay and Marot share sentiments of homesickness and regret during their 'exiles,' upon return to France, the

verse they create is remarkably different. Marot's satirical criticism and angry feelings of abandonment comes to a halt in his "Dieu Gard à la Court de France," and instead, the poet offers renewed loyalty to the court. In this poem, Marot lauds the supremacy of the French court, and prays that "Dieu gard" the whole of the monarchy, along with the entire country of France. This renewed praise possibly has much to do with the fact that Marot, the court poet forever indebted to his royal protectors, must please those who will feed and clothe him, despite any earlier feelings of resentment he held against them.

We must note the somewhat bittersweet words of Du Bellay upon his return, such as what we see in his somewhat tongue in cheek "Paris sans pair" formulation in sonnet CXXXVIII, in which the jaded poet also remarks that, after his unsavory experiences in Rome, a city which he believed to offer unending wonder, he no longer seeks the excitement of unknown grandeur:

"Bref, en voyant... ceste grande cite,

Mon oeil, qui paravant estoit exercité

A ne s'émerveller des choses plus estranges,

Print ebaïssement”¹⁵³

In short, in seeing....this great city,

My eye, which used to be much occupied

In marveling at stranger things

Lowers its lids.

We can read the adjective “estrane” on different levels here. First, we can consider it in an entirely literal context; Du Bellay has been seeking *foreign* inspiration in an alien land, and he is no longer mesmerized by what he sees. If we stretch this further, we might also argue that Du Bellay’s eyes, which spent many years occupied by reading and searching for inspiration in foreign languages, are now weary of seeking the unfamiliar, and instead longs for the familiarity of their own French soil, and French vernacular; we may also postulate that Du Bellay expresses *shame* by lowering his eyes when he re-encounters his native land for having spent so many years abandoning vernacular sources in search of foreign inspiration.

At the end of Du Bellay’s *Regrets*, we see a renewal of loyalty as well, but instead of directing it to his entire country, the poet personifies it in the

¹⁵³ Lines 9-12.

person of Catherine de Medici. Like Marot with the Crown, Du Bellay sings the accolades of Catherine, but she is the only thing in France representative of the splendor that used to inspire him in his poetry. In CLXXI, we read:

Muse, qui autrefois chantas la verde olive,
Empenne tes deux flancs d'une plume nouvelle,
Et te guindant au ciel aveques plus haulte aelle,
Vole où est d'Apollon la belle plante vive.
Laisse (mon cher souci) la paternelle rive,
Et portant desormais une charge plus belle,
Adore ce hault nom, dont la gloire immortelle
De nostre pole arctiq' à l'autre pole arrive.
Loüe l'esprit divin, le courage indontable,
La courtoise douceur, la bonté charitable,
Qui soutient la grandeur, et la gloire de France.
Et dy, ceste Princesse et si grande et si bonne,
Porte dessus son chef de France la couronne:
Mais dy cela si hault, qu'on l'entende à Florence.

Muse, who used to sing of the green olive,

Feather your two sides with a new plume,
And guiding yourself to the heavens with a higher flight,
Fly where the beautiful living plant of Apollo exists.
Leave (my dear worry) the paternal brink,
And thereon carrying a more beautiful burden,
Adore this high name, of which the immortal glory,
Spans from the Northern pole to the South,
Praise the divine spirit, the unbreakable courage,
The courtly sweetness, the charitable goodness,
Which supports the grandeur, and the glory of France.
And say, this princess [is] so great and so good,
[She] Wears the crown under her leader:
But, say this so loudly, that it's heard all the way in Florence.

Instead of lamenting the abandonment by his muse, as he did during most of his stay in Italy and in most of his sonnets in the *Regrets*, upon returning to France at the end of the collection, Du Bellay now bids his muse to work her magic in singing the praises of the most worthy *native* source he can think of, the princess Catherine de Medicis. In the same way that Marot uses “maternal” and “paternal” to distinguish his linguistic

trajectory, from Cahors en Quercy to the court, Du Bellay here links the ‘paternal’ banks of Rome with past bitter experience, and his abandonment by his poetic muse, and to his time spent chasing foreign sources. Contrarily, the princess, associated fundamentally with the ‘maternal’ by her association with the French crown—and, by extension, Du Bellay’s maternal tongue—is connected with positive, future possibilities for promoting—indeed saving—the “grandeur” and “gloire” of France, and ensuring immortality via a reconnection with the native. By sending away his muse to direct her attention to this French “charge plus belle,” Du Bellay renounces once and for all his more youthful poetic pursuits of foreign grandeur, and returns to the familiarity of native sources.

At the end of the *Regrets*, we may see the true colors of Du Bellay; in seeking to create something higher and mightier in his verse, in abandoning the seeming banality of the familiar for the foreign, he recognizes that he has gone astray in losing sight of his own roots. Whereas Marot always recognized his French sources, patriotic and poetic, and attentively returns to them, despite the injustice and pain they may have caused him, for Du Bellay, there can only be regret for the many years spent distancing himself from those native sources which might have been his truest inspiration, and which at the end of his life, he equates with poetic and personal *salvation*.

Conclusion:

Reconsidering the Pléiade in the Context of the Vernacular

A l'inverse des jeunes et turbulents poètes de la Pléiade, Marot fuit le tapage et l'éclat. Il s'affiche vis-à-vis de la tradition dont il hérite un respect, voire une vénération, qui ne se démentira jamais.¹⁵⁴

Contrarily to the young and turbulent poets of the Pléiade, Marot flees hype and pomp. He adheres himself to the tradition for which he inherits a respect, or even venerates, and which he never betrays.

While the above quotation refers to Marot, it is also revealing in the context of the present study on Du Bellay. Defaux's description of Marot's relationship to native sources is concisely the *counter*-description of Du Bellay, and it points to Du Bellay's greatest struggle; the desire to create a new, French poetry, and a stronger French language, all without the help of his native poetic ancestry. For most of Du Bellay's career, he pursued the

¹⁵⁴ Defaux, "Clément Marot: Une Poétique du silence et de la liberté," xxxiv.

éclat and *tapage* of Pléiade ideals, only to be left embittered and disappointed at the end of his career by the seeming futility of his pursuits of external inspiration.

While we cannot say that Du Bellay ever came to venerate his native poetic predecessors such as Marot, it is obvious that, after his *Deffence* and youthful poetic endeavors such as the *Olive*, in his poetry composed in Rome, there is a strong native, French influence which points to a deep-seated anxiety over being away from his homeland. Whether it be through explicit nods to the *petits genres* of earlier French poetics, or indeed, even direct Maroticization, such as we see in the *Jeux rustiques*, or the appropriation of French elements into native imagery, such as we see in the *Antiquitez*, and elsewhere, it is obvious that Du Bellay feels a great nostalgia for France during his stay in Rome, and attempts to ease the pain by including all of these native elements in his poetry.

The longer the poet is away from France, the more we see his idyllic vision of the vernacular, as laid out in the *Deffence*, slip away. As he becomes more aware of his exile from France, the more in-tune he becomes with his French identity, including, importantly, his French *linguistic* identity and his affinity to Marot and to other French predecessors. This awareness culminates in the *Regrets*, where the author speaks bitterly of how his native

tongue has become foreign to him the longer he lives in a foreign land, and how he has to resort to using Latin in order to get any recognition for his poetic endeavors. Ultimately, this bitterness turns to exasperation, and tired of trying to create a false sense of ‘nativity’ by writing in the vernacular in a sea of foreigners and foreign-ness, Du Bellay resorts to composing the *Poemata*, a collection of Latin poetry, and his last collection to be published.

It seems that while modern critics are fast to point out how Du Bellay doesn’t adhere to his own advice in the *Deffence* regarding poetry in his later poetic works, his poetic theory is still largely influenced by his relationship with his native tongue, and indeed, the change in his linguistic situation during his exile. As we have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, Du Bellay’s relationship with the vernacular is deeply rooted in his relationship to native sources; despite his earlier desires to leave native sources behind, when his wishes become reality during his ‘exile’ in Rome, he becomes more aware of their importance. France and everything associated with it becomes linked with the idea of ‘salvation’ for Du Bellay; both in the sense of poetic salvation, as the poet returns to his inspirational French ‘Muse,’ as well as personal salvation, as Du Bellay becomes psychologically fatigued by seeking motivation in foreign sources in a foreign land, and in a foreign tongue. Only when he is trying to write in the vernacular in a foreign land, away

from native sources, is he able to recognize the artificiality and indeed, impossibility of realizing in his poetry his linguistic visions as presented in the *Deffence*. While Du Bellay holds true to the idea throughout his literary career that the success of France is inherently linked to the success of the French vernacular, as he grows older and increasingly weary of everything ‘foreign,’ he comes to realize that just as it is important for new French poets to cultivate the vernacular for the success of the nation, the strength of the vernacular also lies in its native, national, literary roots.

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNICATIVE ANXIETIES IN MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE'S ESSAIS

Introduction: Montaigne and Language

Michel de Montaigne's conception of language is paradoxical; it is continually in flux, continually coming together only to come apart again. Montaigne views language as a necessary tool in the search for his own identity. But, at the same time, he sees it as constantly lacking tool, an external system that will always be somehow insufficient in expressing precision, communicability, and stability. As a subject purportedly raised with a literary language—Latin—as his 'mother' tongue,¹⁵⁵ Montaigne is himself a linguistic anomaly. While reaffirming the equality of human (and animal) systems of communications, he is nonetheless preoccupied with valorizing some systems over others, often qualifying idioms on the basis of

¹⁵⁵ In "Courtly French, Learned Latin, and Peasant Patois: The Making of a National Language in Early modern France," Cohen raises an excellent question; "Was Latin really Montaigne's first language?" (see note, page 207). Considering incongruities in the text of the *Essais* relating to the languages that he spoke at different times in his life, I agree with Cohen's assessment that Montaigne likely grew up learning a mix of Latin, French, and Oç, and that likely, too much has been made of the idea that he grew up speaking only Latin. Nonetheless, given the complexity of the linguistic landscape he lived in, Montaigne's relationship with languages would have necessarily been complicated from birth.

nothing more solid than their phonological aesthetics. Communication is the most worthy human activity for Montaigne, who recognizes, centuries before the establishment of a field of pragmatic linguistics, that it is a complex system based on more than just an oral/auditory exchange, but one that is also influenced by countless extra-linguistic factors.

Within the broader context of language, I am concerned with examining the anxiety of communication in the vernacular as an important dilemma in Montaigne's *Essais*. How, for instance, does the author juggle his desire for personalized language within the constraints of a necessarily regulated speech community? Furthermore, as Montaigne the traveler and man of the world is very astutely tuned in to the local vernaculars around him, what can his comments regarding these dialects tell us regarding any potential preferences—and biases—in communicative means? And, as Montaigne revises his *Essais* over time—publishing only the first two books in 1580, adding the third in 1588, and adding additional revisions in 1595¹⁵⁶—how does his vision of the vernacular change?

In this chapter, I will examine some of the puzzles in vernacular communication that Montaigne presents in his *Essais* and try to situate these ideas in the context of sixteenth century debates on the vernacular,

¹⁵⁶ In this chapter, I indicate the different *couches* of citations from Montaigne as they are indicated in *Essais*, Chronologie et introduction par Alexandre Micha (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1979): / for the 1580 edition, // for the 1588 edition, and /// for the additions in 1595.

discussions in which communicative anxieties are at the forefront. I argue that some of the important paradoxes of language and communication in the *Essais* already dominated sixteenth-century language treatises, and that Montaigne expanded and exploited these in his own writing, both in his usage of language and in his ideas about language. Specifically, I will focus on Montaigne's penchant toward conversation, rather than writing; I will examine his ideas about "words," and will compare each of these underlying features with similar issues found in the works of Abel Mathieu, Joachim Du Bellay, and Charles Bovelles.

Whether it be speaking with those in his surrounding community, conversing with his own text, or with the readers of his text, Montaigne expresses a constant apprehension over being able to successfully communicate. In this chapter, I will situate those communicative anxieties in the context of the vernacular and explore how Montaigne's ideas compare and contrast with those of his contemporaries who were more directly implicated in sixteenth-century debates on language.

The Supremacy of Conversation: Orality and 'Naïve' Expression

No matter what pitch of frankness, directness, or authenticity he may strive for, the writer's mask and the reader's are less removable than those of the oral communicator and his hearer. For writing itself is an indirection. Direct communication by script is impossible. This makes writing not less but more interesting, although perhaps less noble than speech. For man lives largely by indirection, and only beneath the indirections that sustain him is his true nature to be found. Writing alone, however, will never bring us truly beneath to the actuality.¹⁵⁷

The above quotation from the modern philosopher and Jesuit priest, Walter Ong, could easily have been written about a central anxiety of our sixteenth century author, Montaigne. To be sure, Ong does focus a great deal on Renaissance humanism in his studies on the transition from oral to scribal culture, so it is by no means surprising to link his ideas to Montaigne's. Montaigne struggles with the inadequacies of the written word, and his effort to write 'on paper as on the mouth' gives way to a distinctive

¹⁵⁷ Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 80.

conversational writing style that is matchless in his century, and perhaps entirely unique to the author himself. This preference also points to the important status Montaigne must necessarily accord the vernacular.

Although Latin may pepper his *Essais*, the vernacular (French, Italian, or dialectal varieties of the two) remains the only practical medium for the spoken word. In this section, I will give an overview of Montaigne's musings on language in general in order to address the more specific question of his position on the vernacular later in the chapter.

Montaigne plainly gives precedence to spoken communication over written throughout his essays. He holds that, even though the transfer of thought to sign will always be inadequate, there is nonetheless a reduced amount of loss in the transfer from thought to spoken, rather than written, word.¹⁵⁸ Conversation is one of the most noble and worthy activities in Montaigne's estimation, and oral exchange is thus given precedence over any written sort. After a long introduction about the importance of learning by example, Montaigne remarks in "De l'art de conferer";

¹⁵⁸ Montaigne's preference for spoken rather than written language is important for his conception of language in general, and it has not escaped the notice of critics. Three works which address the question explicitly are Marie-Luce Demonet, "Le 'Trait de plume' de Montaigne," *Etudes Françaises* 29.2 (1993): 45-63, Fausta Garavini, "'Tel sur le papier qu'à la bouche ...' Montaigne entre l'écrit et l'oral," *Ethnologie Française: Revue Trimestrielle de la Société d'Ethnologie Française* 20.3 (1990): 284-289, and Michel Jeanneret, "Rabelais et Montaigne: L'écriture comme parole," *L'Esprit Créateur* 16.4 (1976): 78-94.

Jeanneret's work is most useful for my own research, both because he examines Montaigne's conception of the written and spoken "parole" in tandem with Rabelais, and also because he examines Montaigne's linguistic theories in the context of the Classical theories he was working from. Both Demonet and Garavini situate Montaigne's concept of writing within modern theoretical frameworks, and both focus more on writing than on the spoken word.

//Le plus fructueux et naturel exercice de nostre esprit, c'est à mon gré la conference. J'en trouve l'usage plus doux que d'aucune autre action de nostre vie ; et c'est la raison pourquoy, si j'estois asture forcé de choisir, je consentirois plustost, ce crois-je, de perdre la veuë que l'ouïr ou le parler.¹⁵⁹

Our mind's most fruitful and natural exercise is, to my fancy, conference. I find its custom sweeter than any other of our life's actions; and that's the reason why, if I were forced to choose right now, I would consent rather- this I believe- to lose the ability of sight or hearing, rather than speech.

Just as he believes that not only prisoners themselves, but the public learns from judicial punishment, so it is that we learn not only from our own actions, but from the actions of those among us; thus he highlights the importance not only of conversation as a learning device, but the importance of living in a varied discursive community.

For Montaigne, speaking or oral debate of any sort should be a

¹⁵⁹ Montaigne, *Essais*, III.8, 137.

spontaneous exploit; the most pure and direct exchange of thought into verbal action. In the earlier essay, “De l’institution des enfants,” in the context of what it takes to ‘make a gentleman,’ Montaigne notes:

/ Mais que nostre disciple soit bien pourveu de choses, les parolles ne suivront que trop; il les trainera, si elles ne veulent suivre. J’en oy qui s’excusent de ne se pouvoir exprimer, et font contenance d’avoir la teste pleine de plusieurs belles choses, mais, à faute d’eloquence, ne les pouvoir mettre en evidence. C’est une baye. Sçavez-vous, à mon advis, que c’est que cela ? Ce sont des ombrages qui leur viennent de quelques conceptions informer, qu’ils ne peuvent desmeler et esclarcir au-dedans, ny par consequant produire au dehors : ils ne s’entendent par encore eux mesmes. Et voyez les un peu begayer sur le point de l’enfanter, vous jugez que leur travail n’est point à l’accouchement, mais à la conception, et qu’ils ne font que lecher cette matiere imparfaicte. De ma part, je tiens, ///et Socrates l’ordonne/, que qui a en l’esprit une vive imagination et claire, il la produira, soit en Bergamasque, soit

par mines s'il est muet.¹⁶⁰

But because our disciple is well provided with things, the words will only follow superfluously; he will follow them if they merit being followed. I hear some people who excuse themselves for not being able to express themselves and who give the appearance of having a head full of many goodly things, but, with lack of eloquence, cannot provide evidence of such. It's a fib. Do you know what, in my opinion, this is? These are the shadows of some un-formed judgments which they cannot detangle and enlighten within, nor can they, consequently, produce them outwardly: they don't understand themselves any better. And when you see them fumble a little bit when they are about to produce something, you judge that their work is not at all at the birth, but still in conception, and that they do nothing but lick this imperfect matter. On my part, I hold, and Socrates commands, that, whoever has a lively and clear imagination, he will produce something, be it in Bergamesque or in mime if he is mute....

¹⁶⁰ Montaigne, *Essais*, 1.XXVI, 216-217.

If you cannot immediately express a thought in words, no matter how complex it might be, then, according to Montaigne, the thought does not truly exist; as such, the psycho-linguistic transfer is lightning fast. There should be a certain ease and nonchalance, or *sprezzatura*, to human speech which produces a simulachrum of honesty and naturalness without necessarily being honest or natural. The concept of *sprezzatura* as established in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* pervades the literary attitudes of a number of sixteenth-century French writers, including Montaigne.¹⁶¹ Where good thoughts exist for the essayist, good speech should follow, and quickly at that.

While Montaigne gives precedence to oral rather than written communication, he is also fascinated by non-verbal communication. The preceding citation echoes Socrates' belief that he who is able to think great thoughts must also be able to communicate them, no matter which system they use, linguistic or extra-linguistic. Montaigne remarks in the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond," if speech does *not* come naturally, it isn't entirely necessary; he gives the example of mutes who are able to 'dispute,' 'argue,' and tell stories by signs alone, as well as the example of sign languages and

¹⁶¹ For more on the concept of *sprezzatura* in Montaigne, see John C. Lapp, "Montaigne's 'negligence' and Some Lines from Virgil," *Romanic Review* 61 (1970): 167-181.

“grammaires en gestes” (gesticular grammars). However, Montaigne also conjectures that a child raised in full solitude would still have “quelque espece de parole pour exprimer ses conceptions”¹⁶²(some sort of speech for expressing his ideas), giving weight to his theory that there is, indeed, *some* innate quality to human speech.

Montaigne follows his discourse on mutes and his hypothetical ‘feral’ child with one on the universality of speech in the animal kingdom; indeed, he sees all animals as being able to convey information in some manner;

//...car, qu’est ce autre chose que parler, cette faculté que nous leur voyons de se plaindre, de se resjouyr, de s’entr’appeler au secours, se convier à l’amour, comme ils font par l’usage de leur voix ? Comme ne parleroient elles entr’elles ? elles parlent bien à nous, et nous à elles. Et combien de sorte parlons nous à nos chiens ? et ils nous respondent. D’autre langage, d’autre appellations divisions nous avec eux qu’avec les oyseaux, avec les pourceaux, les beufs, les chevaux, et changeons d’idiome selon l’espece.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Montaigne, *Essais*, 2.XII, 124.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 2.XII, 124-125.

....because, is this something other than speaking, this faculty that we see in them to complain, to rejoice, to call each other to safety, to invite each other to love, as they do with the use of their voice? How do they not speak amongst each other? They do speak to us, and we to them. And in how many ways do we speak to our dogs? And they respond to us. With another language, with other callings we chat with them as well as with birds, with pigs, cattle, horses, and we change the idiom according to the species.

Communication, according to Montaigne, is not a uniquely human capacity, nor is language, as he recognizes that each species has its own sort of 'idiom.' However, while animals may be able to talk to us, and us to them, this is not the same kind of *conference*, or communication, that the essayist references elsewhere; for while we may speak to our dogs, and while they may respond in a conditioned way, we never will converse with them as we may with others who share the same linguistic system as us. There is a difference here between *langage* and *langue*; while different animal species may have unique *langages*, only humans are able to use and manipulate their own *langue*. Conversation, according to Montaigne, is a two-way exchange, and

requires not only the participation, but the response and comprehension of both parties. Shifting again to a later essay, “De l’expérience,” in the context of a discussion about how messages can be altered through the modification of the voice of the speaker, Montaigne moves away from his earlier obsession over “individualism” in language by addressing the matter of conversation, noting that it is hardly a one-way street;

//La parole est moitié à celuy qui parle, moitié à celuy qui l’escoute. Cettuy-cy se doit preparer à la recevoir selon le branle qu’elle prend. Comme entre ceux qui jouent à la paume, celuy qui soustient se desmarch et s’apreste selon qu’il voit remuer celuy qui luy jette le coup et selon la forme du coup.¹⁶⁴

Speech is half the person who is speaking, half the person who is listening. The latter must prepare himself to receive the speech according to the move that it makes. As between those who play tennis, he who is receiving must play and get himself ready according to how he sees the other serve the ball, and according to the form of the serve.

¹⁶⁴ Montaigne, *Essais*, 3.XIII, 299.

The « forme du coup » in this tennis game of conversation might be understood as the « forme » of language used; the game can only continue when the linguistic system is matched, and receiver can respond appropriately to sender.¹⁶⁵

In the spirit of another Renaissance master, we may remember the introduction of Panurge into Rabelais' Pantagruel; even though he has learned a bevy of foreign languages and expresses himself quite fluently in them, he is only able to enter into productive linguistic commerce with Pantagruel when he discovers their common idiom, French. The same holds for Montaigne's feral child; he may be able to formulate some linguistic system to express himself, but nobody else will be able to truly communicate until they also learn this system. We must gain knowledge of a language, either through immersion or systematic study, in order to communicate with it. Montaigne's earlier dream for an entirely naïve, natural, and *personal* idiom would thus be quite problematic for communication.

Another cog is thrown into Montaigne's idealized communication machine when we introduce the element of *body* language. For, as much as linguistic signs can never be perfect representatives of *cogitation*, they are further complicated when we realize that the voice, much like Montaigne's

¹⁶⁵ For an excellent semantic analysis of this episode, see Richard Waswo, *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 181.

word, is also *incorporated*; the body, moreover, may not always be a perfect mirror to the thought being expressed.

As much as Montaigne wants the written word to be “tel sur papier qu’à la bouche, » he still recognizes the impossibility of a *spoken* idea to remain untouched by external factors. Vehemently opposed to rhetoric, Montaigne is nonetheless aware of the importance of a key category of rhetoric, *elocutio*, and pays tribute in his essays to two components of rhetoric supplementary to elocution: pronunciation and ‘delivery’.

Montaigne believes that the effectiveness of segmental phonemes should be amplified by changing supra segmental phonemes. In “De l’experience,” the author expresses his desire to manipulate his voice to maximize the effectiveness of the intended message;

//Le ton et mouvement de la voix a quelque expression et signification de mon sens ; c’est à moy à le conduire pour me représenter. Il y a voix pour instruire, voix pour flater, ou pour tancer. Je veux que ma voix, non seulement arrive à luy, mais à l’avanture qu’elle le frappe et qu’elle le perse.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Montaigne, *Essais*, 3.XIII, 299.

The voice's tone and movement has some expression and signification of my meaning; it's up to me to guide it to represent myself. There's a voice for teaching, a voice for flattering, or for chiding. I want my voice to not only reach him [the listener], but by chance even strike and pierce him.

For Montaigne, it's the job of the speaker to better 'represent' himself and his intentions to others through the manipulation of the voice; the spoken word has the possibility for infinite meanings through further inflection. Furthermore, not only the voice, but the body has the potential to control meaning. As he remarks in "De la praesumption ;"

/Le mouvement et action animent les parolles, notamment à ceux qui se remuent brusquement, comme je fay, et qui s'eschauffent. Le port, le visage, la voix, la robbe, l'assiette, peuvent donner quelque pris aux choses qui d'elles mesmes n'en ont guere, comme le babil.¹⁶⁷

Movement and action animate words, notably those which

¹⁶⁷ Montaigne, *Essais*, 2.XVII, 302.

move on briskly, as I do, and which heat up. The state, the face, the voice, the dress, the seat, can all give some weight to things which hardly have any on their own, such as chatter.

According to Montaigne, here, body language and indeed, even a person's outward appearance can have greater impact than the actual words themselves. However, although Montaigne lauds the capacity of the voice and the body to amplify meaning in speaking, he nonetheless finds himself master of neither his own voice nor his own body. This discernment is intensified with the edition of the third *couche* of the second citation;

/ Il me souvient donc que, dès ma plus tendre enfance, on remerquoit en moy je ne sçay quel port de corps et des gestes tesmoignants quelque vaine et sottie fierté....Et de telles inclinations naturelles, le corps en retient volontiers quelque pli sans nostre sçeu et consentement.

I remember, then that, since my tender youth, people remarked some sort of body-carriage and gestures which spoke to some vain and stupid pride.....And from such natural inclinations,

our body willfully holds on to some habit without our knowledge and consent.

/Au demeurant, mon langage n'a rien de facile et poly : il est aspre ///et desdaigneux, /ayant ses dispositions libres et desreglées ; et me plaist ainsi, ///si non par mon jugement, par mon inclination. /Mais je sens bien que par fois je m'y laisse trop aller, et qu'à force de vouloir éviter l'art et l'affectation, j'y retombe d'une autre part.¹⁶⁸

Moreover, my language has nothing easy and polished about it: it is harsh and disdainful, having free and disordered inclinations; and it pleases me thus, if not by my decision, then by my disposition. But I do feel that sometimes I let myself go too far, and that in trying to avoid artifice and affectation, I fall back into these very ways.

It is curious that someone so obsessed with written and spoken language, and the ability to turn language to his own means, should at the same time

¹⁶⁸ Montaigne, *Essais*, 2.XVII, 296 and 301.

feel so helpless in regards to his own ability to *physically* communicate. The author feels increasingly betrayed by his body and its language, which portray a countenance and expression foreign to that which he wishes to represent. His facial and body gestures expose an arrogance which is not his own, an appearance quite different from the idea he wishes to portray, and in trying too hard to speak in an unaffected, 'natural' way, he falls into a pattern of quite artificial expression. As a result, Montaigne considers himself a terrible storyteller and a mediocre conversationalist (which is quite awkward, given the supremacy he accords to this pastime!) If Montaigne wishes to project a certain nonchalant quality in his speech, he also realizes that in trying too hard to be natural, speech necessarily becomes simulated and strained.

This seems like the ultimate defeat for Montaigne, the steadfast defender of 'natural,' personal language, who seems to have no defense against the deceitful powers of voice and gesture in his own person. Interestingly, we may be able to find a correlation between Montaigne's conception of extra-linguistic expression through gesture and inflection and his ideas about rhetoric.¹⁶⁹ The author views rhetoric as disguising intention through selection and arrangement of words, more sinful than the use of

¹⁶⁹ In many ways, Montaigne's distrust of rhetoric is a product of his times. As Waswo comments, "Rhetoric never quite recovers from the distrust and scorn that Plato had for the Sophists. Even when its prestige is expanded by Renaissance humanists, their revived insistence that the good speaker must necessarily be a good man betrays all the anxieties about the use of words that result in the dualistic exile of meaning from the treacherous medium that expresses it." *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*, 35.

make-up to mask true beauty (or lack thereof) in women because rather than acting as a façade, it has the ability to corrupt inner meaning. As he remarks of eloquence in “De la vanité des paroles »;

/Un Rhetoricien du temps passé disoit que son mestier estoit,
de choses petites les faire paroistre et trouver grandes. //C’est
un cordonnier qui sçait faire de grands souliers à un petit pied.
/On luy eut faict donner le fouët en Sparte, de faire profession
d’un’art piperesse et mensongere...../Ceux qui masquent et
fardent les femmes, fon moins de mal ; car c’est chose de peu
de perte de ne les voir pas en leur naturel, là où ceux-cy font
estat de tromper non pas nos yeux, mais nostre jugement, et
d’abastardir et corrompre l’essence des choses.¹⁷⁰

A Rhetorician of old times would say that his profession was to
make small things appear great. This is a shoe maker who
knows how to make big shoes for a small foot. He would have
been whipped in Sparta for making his profession from a
deceptive and lying art.....Those who mask and paint women

¹⁷⁰ Montaigne, *Essais*, 1.LI, 361.

do less evil; as it's a small loss to not see them in their natural state, whereas those others [rhetoricians] make a practice of tricking not our eyes, but our judgment, and by bastardizing and corrupting the essence of things.

Is body language, then, as Montaigne describes it, even more dangerous than Rhetoric, deceiving not only our eyes, but 'corrupting' « l'essence des choses » which we are trying to communicate? The only difference between the two seems to be that while the rhetorician works hard to attain control over his manipulation of language, Montaigne only has limited control of his body and voice; where rhetoric usually masks purposefully, body language has the capacity to mask true meaning in a much more surreptitious way. Already, we must question the status that the vernacular can hold for Montaigne as a system which is potentially corruptible not only by individuals through the use of rhetoric and body language, but furthermore, through the interference of society itself. In the next section, we will see that Montaigne's rapport with the vernacular is just as volatile as his relationship with language—and communication—in general.

Situating The Essais within Sixteenth century French Language

Debates: The Law of Language in Montaigne and Abel Mathieu

Montaigne—despite his famous Latin upbringing—has been widely considered the first Romanic author to write a major piece of philosophical work in the language of the ordinary people.¹⁷¹ His interest—verging on obsession—with language systems and desire to manipulate such systems has already been introduced here, and we will continue to examine it at some length in this chapter. It seems pertinent, then, to study Montaigne’s views in tandem with that of sixteenth-century debates on the French vernacular, a contest in which participants are concerned with promoting what they view as an underdeveloped French linguistic system to one which could rival that of Ancient Greek and Latin as a literary language.

The years between 1530 and 1560 see an enormous increase of writings in and on the vernacular. This movement of nationalistic vernacular promotion begins at the beginning of the century with scholars such as

¹⁷¹ See Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 302: “Theoretical prose written in the language of ordinary people had appeared before Montaigne in France, Italy, and Spain. Yet among the Romanic peoples within the category of philosophical writings in the narrower sense—and despite the difficulties of specifying their exact place, the *Essais* belong here—Montaigne is the first to express a significant and original body of thought *exclusively* in the language spoken by ordinary people. The philosophical literature written in French which had come to light in France up till then—Pierre de la Ramee, for example—cannot be compared with Montaigne, and it did not become a national treasure that still lives today, as did the *Essais*. . . . This use of two languages, which reflected the rivalry of national and humanistic considerations, persisted into Montaigne’s century (Calvin, Bodin) and continued (though the reasons had changed) to Descartes and beyond. Montaigne, however, although he had known Latin from his youth on, did not vacillate in his choice of French.”

Claude de Seyssel and Geofroy Tory. In 1530, John Palsgrave and Jacques Dubois (a.k.a Jacobus Sylvius) publish their French-English and French-Latin grammars; until this date, grammars in France were either composed in Latin or written for foreigners wishing to learn French. In 1539, Robert Estienne publishes the first French-Latin dictionary, proving French to be a valid source language for composition and translation. In the 1540s-1560s, the French language has already proven itself as a legitimate topic of study for its native speakers, and as such, much debate erupts over the best way to *cultivate* the burgeoning vernacular, be it with orthographic and/or grammatical reform (Meigret, Peletier, Ramus), or with treatises on poetry and rhetoric.

Considering that this most prolific period of writing on the vernacular occurred immediately preceding Montaigne's composition of the *Essais*, it is reasonable to believe that the author would have been sensitive to the debate raging over the vernacular. He certainly is aware of Pléiade language initiatives, as he mentions Du Bellay and Ronsard by name in his "De l'institution des enfants,"¹⁷² and speaks in the *Essais* of poetic imitation and the fostering of fledgling French poets. No matter what exposure he might

¹⁷² « Depuis que Ronsard et du Bellay on donné credit à nostre poësie François, je ne vois si petit apprentis qui n'enfle des mots, qui ne renga les cadences à peu près comme eux....Pour le vulgaire, il ne fut jamais tant de poëtes. Mais, comme il leur a esté bien aisé de représenter leurs rithmes, ils demeurent bien aussi court à imiter les riches descriptions de l'un et les delicates inventions de l'autre. » Montaigne, *Essais*, 1.XXVII, 218.

have had to other treatise and grammar-writing compatriots outside of the Pléiade, what is apparent is that most other writers on language share a common goal with our essayist—the formulation of a linguistic system that would maximize communication, be it between an author and his literary public, or among the dialectally stratified peoples of a budding nation.

In regarding Montaigne in the context of these treatises, I put aside rhetoric and the poetic arts—the author is clear in his distaste for the former¹⁷³ and his ambivalence towards the latter¹⁷⁴—and focus on those texts that are more concerned with the expansion and standardization of the French vernacular as a national system of communication. In particular, I will look at three treatises—two fairly unknown, but contemporary to Montaigne, and one *very* well known and a predecessor to Montaigne; Abel Mathieu's two *Devis de la langue francaise* (1559 and 1560) and Joachim Du Bellay's *Deffence et Illustration de la langue francoyse* (1549)¹⁷⁵. In examining these authors more closely in tandem, we find that Du Bellay and Montaigne did

¹⁷³ See, for example, *De la vanité des paroles*, « Un Rhetoricien du temps passé disoit que son mestier estoit, de choses petites les faire paroistre et trouver grandes. C'est un cordonnier qui sçait faire de grands souliers à un petit pied. On luy eut fait donner le fouët en Sparte, de faire profession d'un'art piperesse et mensongere.....Ceux qui masquent et fardent les femmes, fon moins de mal ; car c'est chose de peu de perte de ne les voir pas en leur naturel, là où ceux-cy font estat de tromper non pas nos yeux, mais nostre jugement, et d'abastardir et corrompre l'essence des choses. » Montaigne, *Essais*, 1.LI, 361.

¹⁷⁴ See Ibid, 363 : « Oyez dire metonomie, metaphore, allegorie et autres tels noms de la grammaire, semble-t-il par qu'on signifie quelque forme de langage rare et pellegrin ? Ce sont titres qui touchent le babil de vostre chambriere. »

¹⁷⁵ I have chosen to use Du Bellay here not because the arguments he presents about French in his *Deffence* are novel, but because his work builds upon an already well-established tradition of vernacular 'defenses' and is fairly representative of the range of nationalistic pro-vernacular arguments that appear in treatises at this time.

indeed share some common ground regarding language. While no scholarship has yet compared the language ideas of Montaigne and Mathieu¹⁷⁶, both in fact see eye to eye more than with other treatise writers.

The French treatises promoting the vernacular are, on a whole, very non-elitist and accepting of the fact that French, by virtue of being a living language, and not a dead, written one, is one controlled by the French people, and the best way to ‘improve’ the language is to learn about it in all its spheres of use. Furthermore, its variety signals the amplitude of France, the extent of its multiple cultures and its great capacity to absorb difference and diversity.¹⁷⁷ While participants in the debate may be arguing for illustration and embellishment, and while Pléiade aspirations for poetic inspiration may appear quite lofty, in many of the treatises, much credit is given to the simplicity and “naturalness” of the French language in the context of great multiplicity and variety; a mantra that fits well with Montaigne’s own desired linguistic system—“une parler simple et naïf, tel sur le papier qu’à la bouche”¹⁷⁸ (a simple and natural speech, on paper as it is

¹⁷⁶ In fact, there is very limited critical exploration of Mathieu. Nineteenth and twentieth-century language historians such as Ferdinand Brunot and Charles Livet mention Mathieu in their histories of the French language, but he all but disappears from the scene until the late twentieth century, when Haussman- a scholar known more for his work on Meigret- dedicates an article to the *Devīs*. For an analysis of the poetics of Mathieu in his *Devīs*, see Huchon, « La Poétique d’Abel Mathieu, » in *Les Fruits de la Saison : Mélanges de littérature des XVI^e et XVII^e siècles offerts au Professeur André Gendre*, Textes réunis par Philippe Terrier, Loris Petris et Marie-Jeanne Liengme Bessire (Geneva : Librairie Droz, 2000), 321-333.

¹⁷⁷ For more on the diversity of the French language and France’s multiculturalism, see Beaune.

¹⁷⁸ Montaigne, *Essais*, 1.XXVI, 219/.

on the lips).

Montaigne's rendering of communication as the most important human activity also leads him to believe that in order to be a good communicator, one must not surround oneself by people who are too similar, but instead, should seek out diverse company. Du Bellay proposes roughly the same concept in his *Deffence*. When he writes the *Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse* in 1549, Du Bellay is a novice writer who has barely published anything—his family is known for ecclesiastical and diplomatic work, not literary, or indeed, linguistic—but this does not deter him from proposing quite an ambitious program for the French language. While much of the *Deffence* is pillaged from Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo delle lingue*, Du Bellay picks and chooses only those parts appropriate to the French context, leaving behind, for example, central parts of the *questione della lingua* context about courtesan language and 'proper' language usage.

In his *Deffence*, Du Bellay is clear in his intent to expand the French lexicon through imitation and *innovation*. Despite his recommendations of foreign sources for literary imitation, in terms of diversifying the lexicon, he promotes *conversation* at home with a diverse body of people. He wishes his poet to;

....hanter quelquesfois, non seulement les Sçavans, mais aussi toutes sortes d'Ouvriers, et gens Mecaniques, comme Mariniers, Fondeurs, Peintres, Engraveurs, et autres, sçavoir leurs inventions, les noms des matieres, des outiliz, et les termes usitez en leurs Ars, et Metiers, pour tirer de là ces belles comparaisons, et vives descriptions de toutes.¹⁷⁹

.frequent now and then not only wise men, but also all sorts of workers, and manual laborers, such as mariners, founders, painters, engravers, and others, learn their inventions, the names of materials, of tools, and the terms used in their crafts, and professions, in order to pull from them these beautiful comparisons and vivid descriptions of all of them.

Montaigne echoes this sentiment in “De l’institution des enfants”, when he says of the potential young learner that not only should he learn the languages of neighboring countries, but that;

/Il sondera la portée d’un chacun : un bouvier, un mason, un

¹⁷⁹ Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration*, 166.

passant ; il faut tout mettre en besogne, et emprunter chacun selon sa marchandise, car tout sert en mesnage ; la sottise mesme et foiblesse d'autrui luy sera instruction.¹⁸⁰

He'll test the wit of everyone : a cow herder, a mason, a traveler; it's necessary to put everything to work, and borrow from each one according to his merchandise, as everything is useful in a household; even stupidity and feebleness in others will serve as instruction for him.

At heart here seems to be the recognition, acceptance, and *celebration* of the mutative property of a living language—both Montaigne and Du Bellay recognize that communication needs to extend beyond their closed speech community for true linguistic commerce to take place in their native language. In the works of both, there is almost a resistance to linguistic homogenization in the interest of preserving the dialectic diversity of French. (Interestingly, however, this advice only pertains to oral communication; neither Du Bellay nor Montaigne heeds this advice in regards to expanding his own written lexicon, as each prefers to look to

¹⁸⁰ Montaigne, *Essais*, 1.XXVI, 203.

classical Latin and Greek literature and poetry, not native French sources, for literary inspiration.¹⁸¹⁾

Montaigne lives to experiment with language; while traveling, he wants to seek out people from other countries and cultures, not other Frenchmen, so that he can learn and practice not only their customs, but their languages. In “De la vanité,” he criticizes courtesans for spending too much time with people of their own sort. An “honneste homme” (upright, honest man) he says, must be a “homme meslé” (involved man) in various experiences, a distinction he aims for in his own life:

//... je peregrine très saoul de nos façons, non pour chercher des Gascons en Sicile(j’en ay assez laissé au logis); je cherche des Grecs plustost, et des Persans ; j’acointe ceux-là, je les considere ; c’est là où je me preste et où je m’emploie.¹⁸²

...I journey brimming with our behaviors, not in order to look for *Gascons* in Sicily (I left enough of them at home); Rather, I

¹⁸¹ See Richard A. Sayce, *The Essays of Montaigne: A Critical Exploration* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972). Sayce examines the broader question of *imitation*, and is thus able to extend the study of reading to Montaigne’s imitation. He argues, and I agree, that, in contrast with the theories of the Pléiade, Montaigne insists on originality if not of subject at least of form, disposition and language as the ultimate test of a book. However, for my own purposes, I’m interested less in concepts of poetic theory and more on linguistic theory as presented in the sixteenth-century language debates, and would like to move away from this narrow view of poetic imitation.

¹⁸² Montaigne, *Essais*, 3.IX, 199.

look for Greeks, and Persians; I seek out the company of these people, I examine them; it's to this that I lend myself and unto which I employ myself.

In his *Journal de voyage*, moreover, Montaigne laments the fact that while traveling in Padua and Rome, he meets too many Frenchmen and is not able to practice his *Italian* as much as he would like!¹⁸³

As we have already seen, Montaigne gives the unique idea supremacy over any representative signs, and consequently, often takes a fairly *laissez-faire* attitude to established sign systems in his *Essais*. The choice of words and language matters very little to the author as long as communication happens; "...que le Gascon y arrive, si le François n'y peut aller!" (let Gascon work where French cannot!) as he famously remarks in "De l'institution des enfants". In "l'Apologie de Raymond Sebond", Montaigne jokingly gives linguistic advice to a friend traveling in Italy:

//Je conseilloy, en Italie, à quelqu'un qui estoit en peine de parler Italien, que, pourveu qu'il ne cherchast qu'à se faire entendre, sans y vouloir autrement exceller, qu'il employast

¹⁸³ See Montaigne, *Journal de voyage*, Edition présentée, établie et annotée par Fausta Garavini (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 160 and 189.

seulement les premiers mots qui luy viendroyent à la bouche, Latins, François, Espagnols ou Gascons, et qu'en y adjoustant la terminaison Italienne, il ne faudroit jamais à rencontrer quelque idiome dy pays, ou Thoscan, ou Romain, ou Venitien, ou Piemontois, ou Napolitain, et de se joindre à quelqu'une de tant de formes.¹⁸⁴

In Italy, I counseled someone who was having trouble speaking Italian that, as long as he sought only to make himself understood, without otherwise excelling, he should use only the first words which came to his lips, Latin, French, Spanish or *Gascon*, and by adding an Italian ending, it wouldn't ever be necessary to speak any particular idiom in that country, either Tuscan, Roman, Venetian, Piedmontaise or Neopolitan, as he would be able to create another out of so many forms.

Montaigne's remarks may seem to be only half-joking to modern readers who have learned more than one Romance language, as indeed, the similarities between the different offshoots from Latin make them

¹⁸⁴ Montaigne, *Essais*, 2.XII, 211.

generally—albeit vaguely—mutually comprehensible. Of course, as the author notes, using this new motley idiom will only result in being ‘heard,’ without necessarily reaching any ultimate goal of *conversation*. Nonetheless, an overarching theme that runs through the *Essais* is that human language systems are entirely arbitrary conventions of the people who use them, and the author argues that as long as users succeed at communicating at least general meanings, the form the system takes is of little consequence.

Montaigne is constantly bemoaning the fact that he wants to use an idiom that is entirely his own, that he can adapt to his own needs. While in Italy, Montaigne laments not being familiar enough with the Italian dialect to maneuver it on his own terms, to give it ‘something of his own’ as he is accustomed to do with his French language. In “Sur des vers de Virgile,” he remarks that while he was able to make himself be heard in Italy “en devis communs” (using common sayings), he was not fluent enough to make the language ‘his own,’ and thus was not satisfied with his expression:

//..je n’eusse osé me fier à un Idiome que je ne pouvois plier,
ny contourner outre son alleure commune. J’y veux pouvoir
quelque chose du mien.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Montaigne, *Essais*, 3.V, 88.

...I wouldn't have dared to trust an idiom which I couldn't bend, or turn around beyond its usual style. I want to give it something of my own.

These ideas of manipulating, bending and altering his idiom would seem to place Montaigne firmly in line with initiatives of lexical invention, as the lexicon is arguably the most logical part of a linguistic system to manipulate; once components such as grammar and syntax are drastically altered, a given system runs the risk of becoming distorted and unrecognizable, but small tweaks to existing lexemes are generally easily assimilated.¹⁸⁶ Contrariwise, when it comes to creating neologisms, while this is a practice highly lauded by the Pléiade and most of the vernacular-promoting treatise writers who wish to expand French vocabulary, Montaigne is rather vehemently *anti-invention*.¹⁸⁷

As much as Montaigne encourages the learning of foreign languages

¹⁸⁶ Montaigne does not adhere to any one orthographic system in his *Essais*; even in the same edition, we can find a variety of spellings for the same word. See Giovanni Dotoli, *La voix de Montaigne: langue, corps et parole dans les Essais* (Paris: Lanore, 2007), 83. According to Dotoli, "l'orthographe de Montaigne est calibrée sur la voix." That is, he argues, Montaigne *literally* follows the mantra « tel sur papier qu'à la bouche. » While I agree that there is a strong *oral* quality to Montaigne's writing, I believe that Dotoli is stretching this argument too far. This is a common occurrence in many — if not most — sixteenth-century literary works, and I believe that in Montaigne as elsewhere, it is simply the result of not having one single orthographic standard for French to refer to.

¹⁸⁷ Montaigne does actually invent some words, but in comparison to other sixteenth-century writers, his inventions are quite conservative and generally just variations on existing words in the French lexicon. See Floyd Gray, *Le style de Montaigne* (Paris: Nizet, 1958), 37-38.

and conversational commerce with those outside of one's own speech community, and as much as he encourages *borrowing*, in terms of *neologisms*, he remains more guarded than his treatise-writing counterparts.¹⁸⁸ Montaigne wants new French writers to twist and knead language, and stretch the significance of the words in their texts, not just create new words to mask old, flimsy meaning. Lexical invention in the *Essais* is often categorized in the same negative light as *rhetoric*, as he considers both accessorial techniques which lead to greater embellishment, but which do not contribute to substance or meaning. Montaigne worries that writers who seek novel, invented words risk losing the essence of the message they wish to convey, and he criticizes those French writers who rely too much on invention.¹⁸⁹ As he remarks in "Sur des vers de Virgile" :

//Le maniement et emploite des beaux esprits donne pris à la
langue, non pas l'innovant tant comme la remplissant de plus

¹⁸⁸ As Friedrich notes, "In practice....Montaigne is hesitant, as is most of his epoch, to use provincialisms. He even uses archaic language only with great care. We do not find in the *Essais* that chaos of words found earlier in Rabelais, who accumulated lexical lists. Montaigne's range of language is large, but an overview is possible. Neologisms only appear in larger numbers in the later years, most of them in the handwritten additions. They serve to provide greater precision and vividness, and they serve his personal style which evolves continuously toward freer writing, though without contradicting the principles outlined above." *Montaigne*, 364-365.

¹⁸⁹ An early contributor to sixteenth-century French vernacular writings, Geofroy Tory, was similarly conservative when it came to lexical invention. In the "Aux Lecteurs" introduction to his *Champ Fleury*, Tory warns against the lexical corruption of not only "Escumeurs de Latin" and "Plaisanteurs," but also the lexical *inventions* of "Iargonneurs." Even worse than the "Iargonneurs," though, are "...Innouateurs et Forgeurs de motz nouueaulx;" if they are not ruffians, he says, he esteems them to be hardly better! See "Aux Lecteurs de ce Present Liure humble Salut" in *Champ Fleury*.

vigoureux et divers services, l'estirant et ployant. Ils n'y apportent point des mots, mais ils enrichissent les leurs, appesantissent et enfoncent leur signification et leur usage, luy aprenent des mouvements inaccoustumés, mais prudemment et ingenieusement. Et combien peu cela soit donné à tous, il se voit par tant d'escrivains françois de ce siecle. Ils sont assez hardis et dédaigneux pour ne suyvre la route commune ; mais faute d'invention et de discretion les pert. Il ne s'y voit qu'une miserable affectation d'estrangeté, des déguisement froids et absurdes qui, au lieu d'eslever, abbattent la matiere. Pourveu qu'ils se gorgiasent en la nouvelleté, il ne leur chaut de l'efficace ; pour saisir un nouveau mot, ils quittent l'ordinaire, souvent plus fort et plus nerveux.¹⁹⁰

The handling and use of great minds gives worth to language, not innovating it as much as filling it with more vigorous and diverse services, twisting and molding it. They don't add any new words to it, but they enrich their own, rendering them more heavy and deepening their signification and usage,

¹⁹⁰ Montaigne, *Essais*, 3.V, 88.

teaching them movements to which they are unaccustomed,
but all this prudently and intelligently.....As long as they please
themselves with this novelty, the efficacy to them matters little;
in order to seize a new word, they leave the ordinary one—
often stronger and more sinewy—behind.

However, Montaigne does make the argument for borrowing words
in the context of hunting and war, which are ample lexical areas to borrow
from. Regarding the lexicon, nonetheless, Montaigne prefers to rely on the
‘tried and true’ rather than seek novelty in new words. In the same excerpt,
he remarks:

//Comme en nostre commun, il s’y rencontre des frases
excellentes et des metaphores desquelles la beauté flestrit de
vieillesse, et la couleur s’est ternie par maniemment trop
ordinaire. Mais cela n’oste rien du goust à ceux qui ont bon
nez, ni ne desrobe à la gloire de ces anciens autheurs qui,
comme il est vraysemblable, mirent premièrement ces mots en
ce lustre.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Montaigne, *Essais*, 3.V, 88-89.

As in our common [language], one can find excellent phrases and metaphors of which the beauty has worn away with age, and the color has faded from handling in an overly ordinary fashion. But that does not take away any of the flavor for those who have a good nose, nor does it take away from the glory of these ancient authors who, as it is likely, were the first to see these words in their luster.

While Montaigne warns against picking a novel word over a ‘stronger’ and more well-worn older one, Du Bellay, while not wholeheartedly embracing novelty in the French language, nonetheless encourages invention and innovation through the process of *copia* for the amplification of the French lexicon. As he remarks in the *Deffense*;

...je veux bien avertir celui, qui entreprendra un grand œuvre, qu’il ne craigne point d’inventer, adopter, et composer à l’imitation des Grecz quelques Motz François, comme Ciceron se vante d’avoir fait en sa Langue. ...¹⁹²

¹⁹² Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration*, 145, emphasis mine.

I want to warn him who embarks upon a great work, that he not fear *inventing*, *borrowing*, and *composing* some French words in imitation of the Greeks, as Cicero boasts of having done in his language.

For Du Bellay, the fledgling French poet can only do so much for his language by frequenting diverse company in conversation; in order to really fill out the language, it is not only good, but necessary to adopt foreign words and create new, French ones.

It is on this note of lexical innovation that Abel Mathieu enters into my equation. Other than that he was a native of Chartres and a jurist, little is known about the author.¹⁹³ He leaves us three works on the vernacular: the 1559 *Devis de la langue francoyse*, the 1560 *Second devis et principal propos de la langue francoyse*, and a re-written 1572 version of the latter. Although the second *Devis* is largely based on Pietro Bembo's earlier *Prose della volgar lingua*, it nonetheless adapts a tone that is refreshingly different from the scores of grammars and treatises being published during this period. Mathieu takes a sharp turn away from two traditional ideas in the vernacular treatises: first,

¹⁹³ See Alberte Jacquetin-Gaudet's « Introduction » in Abel Mathieu, *Devis de la langue française, 1559 : suivi du Second devis et principal propos de la langue française, 1560*, Texte original transcrit, présenté et annoté par Alberte Jacquetin-Gaudet (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008), 14-21.

he doesn't believe in the Biblical Babel theories of linguistic diversification; and second, he refutes the idea that French could have, in any way, evolved from Greek. Instead, his aims are to examine the native sources of French, and prove that it is a self-sustaining system which needs no outside embellishment. Furthermore, as later critics such as Brunot and Livet are quick to point out, unlike most of the other treatise and grammar writers of his time, Mathieu was in no way erudite; this is reflected in the purposefully colloquial, even 'folksy' nature of his two *Devis*.

While the two treatises are fairly disorganized and differ somewhat in subject matter—the second treats grammar more than the first—the main theme emphasizes what Mathieu considers the inherent excellence and richness of the French language. True and good French is that which is used and understood by all; Mathieu will thus attempt to explain aspects of the French grammar, lexicon, and pronunciation not by pouring it into the traditional, Latin mould, but instead, by creating his own terminology, and explaining concepts through paraphrase and proverbs.¹⁹⁴

Like Montaigne, Mathieu seeks out the common usage and shuns the borrowing of too many foreign words into French. Taking Bembo's lead on

¹⁹⁴ Montaigne is also a fan of using proverbs to emphasize certain arguments. As Bénédicte Boudou notes in a recent study of proverbs in the *Essais*, however, about half of the proverbs cited by the essayist are actually cited in a foreign language. See Boudou, Boudou, "La langue des proverbes dans les *Essais*," *La langue de Montaigne. Etudes Rabelaisiennes*, Tome XLVIII, Edités par Franco Giaccone (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 2009), 473-480.

the purity of the Tuscan of Boccaccio and Petrarch, he claims that the purest and most ‘naïf’ French was that spoken by his French predecessors, as that language evolved without exterior interference and was not corrupted by the necessity of innovation or invention.¹⁹⁵

S’ensuit que l’ancienne mode de parler en France la plus nette et pure, les motz les plus affranchis et les moins brouislez sont propres à nous produictz et engendrez dedans notre territoire, et n’en sommes tenuz quant à cela que à nos premiers peres, Auxquelz Dieu avoit donné si parfaict accomplissement du bien de nature, que leurs vieulx motz contienuez jusques icy, on peu recepvoir la douceur de langue et de l’escripture...¹⁹⁶

It follows that the cleanest and purest old way of speaking in France, the most free and least jumbled words are ours, produced and born in our territory, and for this we are

¹⁹⁵ This is an idea echoed in the letters of another sixteenth-century jurist, Estienne Pasquier. Pasquier believed that all the sixteenth-century attempts to revamp traditional orthography only resulted in distortion of the ‘naïf’ sounds of the French language; it was better to trust in the traditional spelling rules, as the French ancestors who set out to write them were likely presenting the truest simulacra to the original sounds of the language: “il ne faut pas estimer que nos ancestres ayent temerairement ortographié, de la façon qu’ils ont fait, ny par consequent qu’il faille aisément rien remuer de l’ancienneté, laquelle nous devons estimer l’un des plus beaux simulacres qui se puisse presenter devant nous...” » *Choix de lettres sur la littérature, la langue et la traduction* (Genève: E. Droz, 1956), 109.

¹⁹⁶ Mathieu, *Devis*, 111.

beholden to our first fathers, to whom God had given such perfect and natural achievement, that their ‘old’ words have remained here today, whence we can receive the sweetness of their spoken and written language.

Also like his fellow jurist, Mathieu recognizes that words are an essential bond between people—and that language must be equally accessible to a king, a jurist, or a common farmer. While he is not steadfast in his support of legislation such as the Treaty of Villers-Cotterêts or its legal precedents regarding “official” languages in France, he does believe in a moral obligation for the laws of the land to be written in clear language by and of the people, and that jurists are in a special position for programs of language improvement.

J’entends suyvre en mon devis coustume et usage de parler *le plus commun, le plus simple, et le moins corrompu du peuple*, sans avoir esgard aux langues estrangeres mieulx poliees et ornees que n’est la nostre langue Francoyse ...¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Mathieu, *Devis*, 163-164, emphasis mine.

In my *Devis*, I intend to follow the *most common, the most simple*, and *the least corrupt* way of speaking *of the people*, without giving any regard to foreign languages which are more polished and ornate than is our French language...

In their opposition to too much lexical invention, both Montaigne and Mathieu seem to be conscious that vernacular systems must contain rules and order if people are going to communicate successfully with them. Mathieu, despite consistently coming back to the norm of “common usage” will nonetheless write down the rules of the French language for his public. Montaigne dreams of a fully ‘personal’ language, but realizes that without order in a linguistic system, there is a constant threat of misinterpretation and failed communication. The essayist prefers ancient customs to a new, untried state of affairs in general, and he makes no exception for the ‘laws’ of language; as he says in “Des loix somptuaires,” “En toutes choses, sauf simplement aux mauvaises, la mutation est à craindre”¹⁹⁸ (in all things, except the simply bad, change is to be feared).¹⁹⁹ Proper names must remain in

¹⁹⁸ Montaigne, *Essais*, 1.XLIII, 323///.

¹⁹⁹ Montaigne follows Plato in his reasoning here, and the entire quote reads; “Platon, en ses *Loix*, n’estime peste du monde plus dom’ageable à sa cite, que de laisser prendre liberté à la jeunesse de changer en accoustremens, en gestes, en danses, en exercices et en chansons, d’une forme à autre ; remuant son jugement tantost en cette assiette, tantost en cett là, courant après les nouvelletez, honorant leurs inventeurs ; par où les mœurs se corrompent, et toutes anciennes institutions viennent à desdèin et à

their ‘native,’ unaltered state in order to sound natural and familiar, and if foreign words are to be borrowed, they, too should remain in their original form. In his early essay “Des noms”, for example, Montaigne praises Jacques Amyot, a translator whom Mathieu also praised in his 1572 edition of the *Devis*.²⁰⁰

/...je sçay bon gré à Jacques Amiot d’avoir laissé, dans le cours d’un’oraison Françoisse, les noms Latins tous entiers, sans les bigarrer et changer pour leur donner une cadence Françoisse. Cela sembloit un peu rude au commencement, mais dès-jà l’usage, par le credit de son *Plutarque*, nous en a osté toute l’estrangeté. J’ay souhaité souvent que ceux qui escrivent les histoires en Latin, nous laissassent nos noms tous tels qu’ils sont : car, en faisant de Vaudemont, Vallemontanus, et les metamorphosant pour les garber à la Grecque ou à la Romaine, nous ne sçavons où nous en sommes et en perdons la

mespris. » (322-323) For more on Plato’s influence on Montaigne, see Frederick Kellermann, “Montaigne, Reader of Plato,” *Comparative Literature* 8.4 (1956): 307-322.

²⁰⁰ See Trevor Peach, « Le *Devis de la langue française* d’Abel Mathieu (1572) », *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* LV.3 (1993) : 591-602.

Amyot is also praised by another late-16th century scholar interested in the language of law; in Book 8 of his *Recherches*, Pasquier praises the translator for his “naïfveté de langage.” *Les recherches de la France*, Tome III (Paris: H. Champion, 1996), 1519.

connaissance.²⁰¹

...I give hearty thanks to Jacques Amiot for, in the course of an oration, having left Latin proper names in their entirety, without mixing them up and changing them in order to give them a French cadence. This seemed a bit rough in the beginning, but already the usage, by the credit of his *Plutarch*, has ridden itself of all strangeness. I often wished that those who write histories in Latin leave us the names as they are: because, by making a Vaudemont into a Vallemontanus, and metamorphosing them in order to adorn it in Greek or Roman clothes, we don't know where we are and lose our understanding of them.

Montaigne recognizes that a bastardized version of French proper names rendered into Latin will only disconcert readers, inhibiting comprehension. When writing in French, Du Bellay, on the other hand, criticizes those who use Greek and Roman proper names in otherwise French texts:

²⁰¹ Montaigne, *Essais*, 1.XLVI, 333.

Entre autres choses, se garde bien nostre Poëte d'user de Noms propres Latins, ou Grecz, chose vrayment aussi absurde, que si tu appliquois une Piece de Velours verd à une Robe de Velours rouge, mais seroit-ce pas une chose bien plaisante, user en un ouvrage Latin d'un Nom propre d'Homme, ou d'autre chose, en François ?²⁰²

Amongst other things, our Poet must guard against using Latin or Greek proper nouns, a truly absurd thing, as if you applied a piece of green velours on a red velours dress ; but isn't it also funny to use a Latin proper name of a man, or another thing, in French ?

Montaigne's arguments against the *francisisation* of Latin words ring surprisingly clear with Mathieu's invective against the use of Latin and Greek syntactic models to explain French grammar. Mathieu criticizes grammarians for confusing their pupils by trying to teach them French grammar by using obscure Latinized terminology, which he compares to rancid lard in its in-usability;

²⁰² Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration*, 147.

Qui me faict soubconner que les Grammaires (qu'ilz appellent aujourd'hui) n'estoient lors en bruit vers les enfans, veu que les termes d'art dont usent les maistres et docteurs scholastiques vulgaires ne se trouvent pas tous es anciens auteurs, mais sont feincts et controuvez en partie, et en partie plus villains que lard Jaune, ainsi qu'on dict vulgairement.²⁰³

Which reminds me that grammars (as they are called today) were not then intended for children, seeing that the technical terms used by the masters and vernacular scholastics are not found in the work of the old authors, but are feigned and forged in part, and in part more vile than rancid lard, as we commonly say.

In "De la vanité," Montaigne too proves a vehement critic of traditionalist rhetoric and grammar teaching, which he criticizes as "tant de paroles pour les paroles seules!"²⁰⁴ (so many words for words alone!):

²⁰³ Mathieu, *Devís*, 165.

²⁰⁴ Montaigne, *Essais*, 3.IX, 159.

//Oyez dire metonomie, metaphore, allegorie et autres tels
noms de la grammaire, semble-t-il par qu'on signifie quelque
forme de langage rare et pellegrin ? Ce sont titres qui touchent
le babil de vostre chambriere.²⁰⁵

Hear them say metonymy, metaphor, allegory and other such
grammatical terms, so that it seems they speak some sort of
rare and strange language? These are names which resemble
the babbling of your chambermaid.

For Mathieu, a vernacular which has developed organically over time—such
as French—should use a native system to explain grammar. Equally for
Montaigne: while he may wish for a fully personalized linguistic system, he
does realize that he is constrained to communicate with others through a
common language, and as such, that language should remain as ‘naïf’ and
unaltered as possible.

Ultimately, concerning lexical innovation, Montaigne consistently has
a vernacular philosophy much more in tune with that of Abel Mathieu than
with Du Bellay or any other participants in the language debate. Both laud

²⁰⁵ Montaigne, *Essais*, 1.LI, 363.

the simplicity and *naïveté* of the French vernacular. They seek to understand it as a self-regulated system, rather than look for outside methods of improvement. While both recognize the arbitrariness of language, their juristic training also provides them with insight into the necessity of law and order within language; words are a major tool that binds human beings together in truth—“Nous ne sommes hommes et ne nous tenons les uns aux autres que par la parole,”²⁰⁶ (we are only men and our only hold on each other is through words) as Montaigne claims in “Des menteurs”—and thus there must be some order in any language system so that people can successfully communicate in it. Mathieu admittedly takes this idea farther than Montaigne, but the juristic connection²⁰⁷ provides a link about their understanding of language that cannot be found among other treatise writers. It is this stake in human communication in its simplest and purest form that makes Montaigne’s and Mathieu’s understanding of the vernacular unique amongst language debate participants.

²⁰⁶ Montaigne, *Essais*, 1.IX, 73//.

²⁰⁷ The juristic connection in Montaigne and Mathieu also extends to the later author, Estienne Pasquier, who echoes many of the same ideas about language and customary law in his diverse *Lettres*. Because Pasquier was writing after Montaigne, though, and because he did not write any actual ‘treatises’ specific to language, I have relegated any comparisons with him to my footnotes.

Montaigne and Bovelles: Problems of Dialect

While our previous analysis of Montaigne's and Mathieu's mutual concern with order in language might prompt some to label the author of the *Essais* as a staunch proponent of the vernacular, in this final section, I argue that we must sharply qualify such an invariant approach. For, although Montaigne elects to compose the *Essais* in the vernacular and not in Latin, he still considers French to be, in many ways, an unstable and inferior language. This conviction holds true throughout the various editions of the *Essais*, but—as evidenced through subtle additions in the third *couche*—is strengthened at the end of his life.

We must also consider in this the problem of regional languages, for the France of Montaigne's time was hardly a monolingual society,²⁰⁸ and discussions of regional languages crop up more than once in Montaigne's writing. I argue that while Montaigne spends much time writing about the arbitrariness of language, this arbitrariness is taken seriously only in light of language in general. Montaigne *does not* paint all idioms as equal, and—like

²⁰⁸ The complexities of the linguistic landscape in sixteenth-century France is explored at length by Cohen. Cohen argues, and I concur, that in order to understand the rise of the French language in the Early Modern period, it is necessary to understand the social, political, and economic situation of *all* of the regional dialects at play during this time.

For a more 'condensed' look at a specific instance of dialectal diversity in early modern France, see the excellent collection, *Lyon et l'illustration de la langue française à la Renaissance* (Lyon: ENS, 2003), 505-516. The primary goal of this collection is to illustrate the rich literary and cultural environment fostered by the diverse linguistic landscape in Lyon in the sixteenth century.

Rabelais—he goes so far as to construct linguistic hierarchies which valorize certain idioms over others.

To situate Montaigne's ideas within the larger context of sixteenth-century language treatises, I will look at his work in tandem with that of Charles Bovelles. Although it is composed in Latin, and although it is much earlier than the major period of vernacular 'frenzy' in the 1540s-1550s, Bovelles' *Liber de differentia vulgarium linguarum* (1533) is the only sixteenth-century French treatise to explore the issue of dialect in any sort of systematic way, which makes it useful for comparison in issues of regional languages in the *Essais*.

Charles Bovelles (Carolus Bovillus) is an early participant in the sixteenth century French language debate. More commonly recognized as a philosopher, theologian, or writer of Ecclesiastical treatises, Bovelles' only work about language, *Liber de differentia vulgarium linguarum et Gallici sermonis varietate* (in French, *La différence des langues vulgaires et la variété de la langue française*), is not widely considered in the context of the sixteenth-century vernacular debate. However, the *Liber* is important in the history of the French language in that it recognizes the inevitability of language change, the instability of language without set rules, and the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. All of these concerns about language recur extensively in Montaigne's

Essais.

What is significant in both Bovelles' *Liber* and Montaigne's *Essais* is their mutual recognition that the vernacular, as a living system, is constantly changing; furthermore, both see no end to this constant linguistic flux, and offer no real solutions to halt it²⁰⁹. Without centralized standardization for the French language, countless words easily come into and go out of use within a lifetime. In Book 8 of his *Recherches*, Pasquier notes how *written* language change was exacerbated by the political turmoil and linguistic disunity of early modern France. He notes that manuscript scribes did not always produce copy in the same dialect as the original author.²¹⁰ This is a fairly standard issue in sixteenth-century language treatises. Already at the beginning of the century, Geofroy Tory had lamented the changing nature of the French idiom. In the "Aux Lecteurs" section of his *Champ Fleury*, Tory argues for regularization of the French language by pointing out how much

²⁰⁹ Bovelles' answer to this problem is, in essence, a non-solution; he proposes not using the vernacular and resorting to the more reliable dead language, Latin.

²¹⁰ « ...à nostre langue François, laquelle selon la diversité des siècles, a pris diverses habitudes, mais de les vous pouvoir représenter, il est mal aisé. Parce qu'anciennement nous n'eusmes point une langue particulièrement courtizane, à laquelle les bons esprits voulussent attacher leurs plumes. Et voicy pourquoy. Encores que nos Rois tinssent la superiorité sur tous autres Princes, si est-ce que nostre Royaume estoit eschantillonné en pièces, et y avoit presque autant de Cours que de Provinces : la Cour du Comte de Provence, celle du Comte de Tholose, celle du Comte de Flandres, du Comte de Champagne, et autres Princes et Seigneurs, qui tous tenoient leurs rangs et grandeurs à part, ores que la plus part d'eux recogneussent nos Rois pour leurs esprits, escrivoient au vulgaire de la Cour de leurs Maistres, qui en Picard, qui Champenois, qui Provençal, qui Tholowan, tout ainsi que ceux qui estoient à la suite de nos Rois, escrivoient en langage de leur Cour. Aujourd'huy il nous en prend tout d'une autre sorte. Car tous ces grands Duchez et Comtez, estans unis à nostre Couronne, nous que nous appellons langage François. Et ce qui nous oste encore d'avantage la cognoissance de cest ancienneté, c'est que s'il y eust un bon livre composé par nos ancestres, lors qu'il fut question de le transcrire, les copistes les copioient non selon la naïfve langue de l'Auteur, ains selon la leur. » Pasquier, *Recherches de la France*, 1516.

it has already changed, and will continue to change, without set standards:

O Deuotz Amateurs de bonnes Lettres ! Pleust a Dieu que quelque Noble cueur s'employast a mettre & ordonner par Reigle nostre Langage Francois. Ce seroit moyen que maints Milliers dhommes se euerturoient souuent vser de belles & bonnes paroles. Sil ny est mys & ordonne on trouuera que de Cinquante Ans en Cinquante Ans...La langue Francoise, pour la plus grande part, sera changee & peruertie. Le Langage daujourd'hui est change en mille facons du Langage qui estoit il ya Cinquante Ans ou enuiron.

Oh devoted lovers of learning! Please to God that some noble heart takes it upon himself to give rules to and put our French language in order. This would be a means for which many thousands of men would be able to use beautiful and correct words. If it is not put in order, we will see that as each half century goes by, the French language will be for the most part altered and corrupted. The language of today has changed in a thousand ways from the language as it was fifty years ago or so.

Montaigne articulates a similar lament in « De la vanité », pointing out that if the French language continues to change at its current rate, there is little hope that Frenchmen fifty years from now will be able to read his work in its current composition:

//J'escris mon livre à peu d'hommes et à peu d'années.
Si ç'eust esté une matiere de durée, il l'eust fallu
commettre à un langage plus ferme. Selon la variation
continuelle qui a suivy le nostre jusques à cette heure, qui
peut esperer que sa forme presente soit en usage, d'icy à
cinquante ans ? ///Il escoule tous les jours de nos
mains et depuis que je vis s'est alteré de moitié.²¹¹

I write my book for few men and for a few years. If it
had been something last-worthy, it would have been
necessary to write it in a more stable language. Because
of the continual variation that our language has
undergone until today, who could hope that its present

²¹¹ Montaigne, *Essais*, 3.IX, 196.

form be in use fifty years from now? It wafts away from our hands every day, and has already half changed since I was born.

The *couches* of Montaigne's text provide evidence that he is becoming increasingly more anxious about the variability of the vernacular throughout the 1580s, as he edits his text. Here we see stark evidence of this; the 1590 addition of "il escoule tous les jours de nos mains" points to an even greater anxiety of not being able to be familiar with a language that is fluctuating—at least according to Montaigne—so radically and so rapidly.

While Tory and the majority of sixteenth-century vernacular treatise writers would attempt to tackle the problem of linguistic irregularity by proposing systems of standardization (orthographical, grammatical, etc.), neither Bovelles nor Montaigne takes any initiatives of this nature. In fact, Bovelles believes that any attempt to regulate the vernacular will be futile, as the *vulgaire* will ultimately corrupt it through misuse. He mentions his reticence even at writing about the vernacular because it is such an instable entity, controlled by the "ignorant" masses:

"... chaque jour, les défauts d'articulation des humains

amputent, diversifient, altèrent les idiomes sans règles
qu'emploie le vulgaire : à tel point qu'un éloignement peu
considérable change aussitôt le caractère de n'importe quelle
langue populaire et produit une modification dans les
prononciations des hommes ignorants.²¹²

Each day, human error in articulation amputates, diversifies,
and changes the rule-less idioms used by the common people;
to such a degree that a seemingly insignificant distancing soon
changes the character of no matter what common language and
produces a modified pronunciation amongst the ignorant.

We have already pointed out Montaigne's dislike of grammar, and it
appears that from the start, he had little interest in orthographical reform,
especially in the composition of his essays. In the early "De la vanité," he
speaks of the copyediting of his *Essais*:

/Je ne me mesle ny d'ortografe, et ordonne seulement qu'ils
suivent l'ancienne, ny de la punctuation; je suis peu expert en

²¹² Carolus Bovillus, *La différence des langues vulgaires et la variété de la langue française / Liber de differentia vulgarium linguarum et Gallici sermonis varietate*, translated by Colette Dumont-Demaizière (Amiens: Musée de Picardie, 1972), 75.

l'un et en l'autre.²¹³

I don't meddle with spelling, and ask only that they [publishers] follow the old style, nor do I deal with punctuation; I am hardly an expert in either one.²¹⁴

Nonetheless, time and time again in his writings, he makes a point of showing how acutely aware he is of the languages spoken around him. In his *Journal de voyage*, he frequently comments on the idioms spoken in the towns that he has visited, remarking on the different lexical systems and pronunciations. Furthermore, he makes note of the bilingual situations of cities of the border cities he passes through²¹⁵, and he comments upon the political and geographic complexity of language change. In Turin, for example, he remarks the influence French has had on the local people and regional dialect because of the social and political interaction between to the two peoples:

²¹³ Montaigne, *Essais*, 3.IX, 178.

²¹⁴ This statement further nullifies Dotoli's claims that Montaigne's wildly varying orthography was a result of him trying to write in an 'oral' fashion.

²¹⁵ In Plombières, for example, Montaigne notes how the city annually updates a large *tableau* in the city center with the local laws written in both German and French. In Trento, furthermore, he remarks how the city is divided into Italian and German areas; a German quarter of the city even has its own preacher of that language. See Montaigne, *Journal*, 84 and 150.

On parle ici communément français et tous les gens du pays paraissent fort affectionnés pour la France. La langue vulgaire n'a presque que la prononciation italienne, et n'est au fond composée que de nos propres expressions.²¹⁶

French is commonly spoken here, and all the people of this country seem to have a great deal of affection for France. The vernacular language has almost an entirely Italian pronunciation, and is only composed, in essence, of our own expressions.

Bovelles is likewise aware of the influence of geography and politics on language change. His treatise is arguably the only French treatise in the sixteenth century to examine dialectal diversity in any sort of methodical way.²¹⁷ In Chapter II of his *Liber*, “A une distance très modique, on voit bientôt varier la langue populaire” (‘In a very modest distance, we soon see the vernacular change’) Bovelles explains how lack of regulation and the mixing of peoples creates linguistic confusion. Even with standardization,

²¹⁶ Montaigne, *Journal*, 363.

²¹⁷ See Demaizière’s « Introduction » to the *Liber*, 51 : “ Observant les inconséquences de l’usage sitôt qu’on se déplace d’un village à l’autre, et, a fortiori, d’une region à une autre, il ébauche les premiers elements d’une *dialectologie* française. »

however, he argues that the fix is only temporary, because the ignorant and irrepressible *hoi polloi* will ultimately just corrupt the new rules and continue to create unfettered and unlearned new forms of the vernacular. Latin is the only reliable language, he argues, because its rules are determined by wise scholars who are not affected by *hoi polloi*'s misuse and mispronunciation.²¹⁸ Furthermore, he makes the point that choosing a dialectal 'standard' for French is virtually impossible, as everyone judges his or her own dialect to be superior to others, and no one wants to accept an 'inferior' dialect as the imposed standard.

In examining the problem of setting a standard dialect in France, Bovelles illustrates the crux of the entire sixteenth-century language debates; the problem of subjectivity. Virtually the entire Italian *Questione della lingua* revolves around which dialect is 'best', based on little evidence beyond personal preference. Even Du Bellay, in his defense of the French language, does not hesitate to chastise what he deems inferior aural aesthetics in other languages; in speaking of the superiority of the French pronunciation, he proclaims:

Nous ne vomissons pas notz paroles de l'Estommac, comme

²¹⁸ See Bovelles, *Liber*, 31.

les yvroignes, nous ne les etanglons pas de la Gorge, comme les
Grenouilles : nous ne les decoupons pas dedans le Palat comme
les Oyzeaux : nous ne les siflons pas des levres comme les
Serpens...²¹⁹

We don't vomit our words from the stomach, like drunks, we
don't strangle them in the throat, like frogs: we don't stop them
in the palate like birds, we don't whistle them from our lips like
snakes.

Even with the emphasis he puts on the arbitrariness of language in
the *Essais*, when it comes to judging actual idioms, Montaigne illustrates his
own biases, often valorizing certain tongues over others based on little more
than how they sound to his ear. In the *Journal de voyage*, Montaigne
comments on the ill-sounding Bolognese dialect of the pope, who not only
speaks the 'worst' dialect in Italy, but who just speaks poorly in general:

Le langage du pape est l'italien, sentant son ramage bolonais,
qui est le pire idiome d'Italie ; et puis de sa nature il a la parole

²¹⁹ Du Bellay, *Deffence*, 98.

malaisée.²²⁰

The language of the Pope is Italian, smacking of its Bolognese pedigree, which is the worst idiom of Italy; moreover, due to his nature he has an uneasy speech.

In the section he composed in Italian, Montaigne comments that the Tuscan dialect he hears around him is the purest and *sounds* the best because the natives have not ‘mixed’ with inferior dialects around them:

Assagiamo di parlar un poco questa altra lingua massime essendo in queste contrade dove mi pare *sentire il più perfetto favellare* della Toscana, particolarmente tra li paesini che non l’hanno mescolato et alterato con li vicini.²²¹

Let’s try to speak a little of this other excellent language, as we are in this region where, it seems to me, you can hear the most perfect idiom of Tuscany, particularly amongst the peasants who haven’t confused and corrupted it with neighboring

²²⁰ Montaigne, *Journal*, 194.

²²¹ Ibid, 460, emphasis mine.

tongues.

Like Bovelles, Montaigne creates a strong association between the *petit peuple* and the “corruption” of local dialect. Here we might argue that Montaigne is simply repeating a commonplace association inherited from the Italian *questione della lingua* in which Tuscan is hailed as the ‘best’ Italian dialect because of its association with the ‘great’ Italian authors, Boccaccio and Petrarch. However, by adding the qualification that it is the best one because its speakers haven’t mixed it with dialects of neighboring regions, Montaigne indicates that he considers this *negative* language change to be a fault of *hoi polloi*, and not a change which occurred naturally and arbitrarily.

In “De la praesumption,” Montaigne gives his preference for the ‘manly’ and ‘military’ sounding Gascon over his native Perigordin:

///C'est un langage, comme sont autour de moy, d'une bande
et d'autre, le Poitevin, Xaintongeois, Angoumoisin, Lymosin,
Auvergnat: brode, trainant, esfoiré. /Il y a bien au dessus de
nous, vers les montaignes, un Gascon, que je treuve
singulierement beau, sec, bref, signifiant, et à la verité un
langage masle et militaire plus qu'autre que j'entende; ///autant

nerveux, puissant et pertinent, comme le François est gracieux,
delicat et abondant...²²²

It's [Perigordan] a language, as others are around me, of one
faction or another, Poitevan, Xaintoguais, Angoumoisine,
Limousine, Auvergnate: effeminate, lagging, bemired. There is
above us, near the mountains, a Gascon [dialect] which I find
singularly beautiful, sharp, curt, significant, and, in truth, a
more manly and military language than any other I've heard; as
sinewy, powerful and pertinent as the French language is
gracious, delicate, and copious.²²³

Curiously, while Montaigne's comments about the manliness and military
quality of *Gascon* are present from the the 1580 edition, he does not add the
comparison to the other regional dialects until the 1590 Bordeaux edition,
pointing to an increased awareness—and perhaps an increased unease
over—the dialectal variety surrounding him

With all the importance he has granted to oral language in the *Essais*,

²²² Montaigne, *Essais*, 2.XVII, 302.

²²³ Referring to a language as being “feminine” in the sixteenth-century was often to debase it, just as calling a language “manly” was considered to pay it great compliment. In his *Lettres*, Pasquier, for example, refers to the language of the court as being too “soft” and “feminine.” (99)

it is not surprising that Montaigne should give so much consideration to how different idioms sound. He is even critical of his own speech.

Preceding the above citation from “De la praesumption,” Montaigne laments the varying state of French pronunciation, labeling his own pronunciation as “impure”:

/Mon langage françois est alteré, et en la prononciation et ailleurs, par la barbarie de mon creu ; je ne vis jamais homme des contrées de deçà qui ne sentit bien evidentement son ramage et qui ne blessast les oreilles pures françoises...²²⁴

My French language is changed, in pronunciation and otherwise, by the barbarism of my background; I never met a man from those regions who didn't perspicuously feel his pedigree, and who didn't hurt purely French ears [when he spoke]....

Again, Montaigne degrades the foreign or ‘barbaric’ status of his linguistic origins. Because of “la barbarie de mon creu,” his regional

²²⁴ Montaigne, *Essais*, 2.XII, 302.

pronunciation sounds terrible and unfit to him. It is curious, however, that he should argue that his and his country fellows' pronunciation hurts the ears of those who are more 'purely' French than him. Although he never establishes what exactly he means by 'purely French,' we can conjecture that he is referring to those with more distant ancestral roots in France than his own²²⁵. It is nonetheless important that Montaigne includes this comment, as it points to a link between regional identity and linguistic hierarchies. Consequently for Montaigne, the vernacular as a linguistic system is necessarily arbitrary by nature, but different vernacular varieties can still be ranked by their degree of phonological aesthetics, which is, in turn, linked with native 'purity.' Notwithstanding his claims for arbitrariness Montaigne implies that all languages are not created equally, and the most common argument for preferring one idiom over another is generally based on little more than phonological aesthetics.²²⁶ With the emphasis given elsewhere to his preference for oral over written language, however, it follows that Montaigne problematizes phonological rather than orthographical or grammatical reform.

As I have shown in this section, Montaigne was astutely aware of the

²²⁵ Montaigne was born to a French father and a mother of Sephardic Jewish heritage.

²²⁶ Interestingly enough, while much of Bovelles' *Liber* is devoted to lexical etymologies, he also dedicates a great deal of it to the phonology of the French alphabet. Furthermore, when he speaks of *boi polloi* corrupting the vernacular, he generally is referring to corruption through incorrect *pronunciation*.

variety of idioms of idioms spoken around him, and goes so far as to ‘rank’ some over others based on aural aesthetics. But if he is so aware of language change, and if he worries about his language disappearing in fifty years, why does he remain so passive when it comes to issues of vernacular standardization?

Here, we must raise a very significant issue. Both Bovelles and Montaigne bring up the question of the post-Babel²²⁷ diversification of languages as described in *Genesis* 11 in their works. Bovelles, who focuses on the disunity of the French language in his *Liber*, equally emphasizes the *unity* of the pre-Babel tongue, and the fact that any post-Babel language is necessarily confused because of divine intervention:

En effet, ce langage, auparavant uniforme, et partout semblable, Dieu l’avait partagé en plusieurs dans la tour de Babel; de nouveau, par son esprit saint, il le ressembla sur les lèvres choisies et rénovées des Apôtres et le ramena à son unité, car, il est écrit dans les Prophètes : « en ces jours, je rendrai à la terre une prononciation choisie et la langue des bègues parlera vite et clairement ». Qu’est-ce que cela veut dire,

²²⁷ The issue of Babel is very important in sixteenth-century treatises on the vernacular, and my mention of it here in the context of Bovelles and Montaigne is an enormous simplification.

je te prie, sinon qu'il enseigne qu'à la fin, la langue de tous
devra être divinement châtiée, que, de même, les défauts
d'articulation devront être retranchés ou plutôt supprimés, ces
défauts par le moyen desquels les homes ont, en fin de compte,
produit les fondements des langues et idiomes divers, tandis
que ces langues, qui n'en sont pas, se sont détachées
graduellement du sommet et de la règle idéale de leur
archétype, sous l'effet du temps et du lieu.²²⁸

Indeed, this language, previously uniform, and the same
everywhere, God had broken up into many [different
languages] with the Tower of Babel; again, by his holy spirit, he
re-assembled it on the chosen and renewed lips of the Apostles
and brought it back together again, because, it is written by the
Prophets: "in those days, I will assign unto the Earth a chosen
pronunciation and the stuttering will be spoken quickly and
clearly." What does that mean, I ask you, if not that it teaches
that in the end, the language of everyone must be divinely
polished, that, in the same way, the errors of speech must be

²²⁸ Bovelles, *Liber*, 125.

abated or rather restrained, these errors by the means of which men have, in the end, produced the foundations of diverse languages and idioms, whereas these languages, which are not [divinely polished], have gradually detached themselves from the summit and ideal rule of their archetype, under the effects of time and place.

Since post-Babel vernaculars are scrambled by divine ordinance, and because of humankind's punishment we will never be able to return to the perfect, pre-Babel, divine archetype, Bovelles proposes instead that we strive for the most regularized language we can devise. For him, it is Latin.

Montaigne also refers to Babel in "L'Apologie de Raymond Sebond." Beyond the fact that any post-Babel language is divinely mandated to be disordered and imperfect, Montaigne argues that God instituted this confusion of languages to show that mankind is incapable of knowing *anything* without His assistance;

/Toutes choses produites par nostre propre discourse et suffisance, autant vrayes que fauces, sont subjectes à incertitude et debat. C'est pour le chastiment de nostre fierté et

instruction de nostre misere et incapacité, que Dieu produisit le trouble et confusion de l'ancienne tour de Babel. Tout ce que nous entreprenons sans son assistance, tout ce que nous voyons sans la lampe de sa grace, ce n'est que vanité et folie ; l'essence mesme de la verité, qui est uniforme et constante, quand la fortune nous en donne la possession, nous la corrompons et abastardissons par nostre foiblesse.....La diversité d'ydïomes et de langues, dequoy il trouble cet ouvrage, qu'est ce autre chose que cette infinie et perpetuelle altercation et discordance d'opinions et de raisons qu'accompagne et embrouille le vain bastiment de l'humaine science. ///Et l'embrouille utilement.²²⁹

All things produced by our own perusal and self-importance, be they true or false, are subject to incertitude and to debate. It was to punish our pride and remind us of our misery and incapacity that God produced the trouble and confusion of the old Tower of Babel. Everything that we try to do without His assistance, everything that we see without the light of His grace,

²²⁹ 2.XII, 218.

is nothing but vanity and folly; even the essence of truth, which is uniform and constant, when granted to us by fortune, we corrupt and bastardize it by our feebleness.....The diversity of idioms and languages, for which this work troubles itself, what is this other thing but the infinite and perpetual squabble and cacophony of opinions and judgments which accompany and confuse the vain edifice of human science? And which confuse it to good purpose.

As Paul Cohen notes, “Montaigne saw in Babel and linguistic diversity the sign of humanity’s inconstancy and quarrelsomeness.”²³⁰ Moreover, I argue that, as evidenced by the addition of the third *couche*, by the end of his life he saw in it the futility of *attempting to regulate* any idiom that was divinely ordained to be disordered. Human language, like the world itself, “n’est qu’une branloire perenne,”²³¹ and its constant state of flux renders any attempts at defining ‘certainty’ in it futile. This recognition does not make Montaigne an opponent of the vernacular as it does Bovelles (Montaigne does, after all, elect to compose his *Essais* in French, not Latin, while

²³⁰ *Courthy French, Learned Latin, and Peasant Patois: The Making of a National Language in Early modern France*, 80.

²³¹ From « Du repentir, » 3.II, 20. The entire citation reads, “Le monde n’est qu’une branloire perenne. Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse : la terre, les rochers du Caucase, les pyramides d’Aegypte, et du branle public et du leur. La constance mesme n’est autre chose qu’un branle plus languissant. »

Bovelles composes in Latin, not French). Still, Montaigne's belief in Babel and the necessary linguistic confusion that followed elucidates his inherent distrust in man-made communicative systems, and a reluctance to create order in these systems.

Finally, we need to consider Montaigne's recognition of instability in the vernacular within the greater philosophical scheme of his *Essais*. A major theme in Montaigne is that of "Que sais-je," and the idea that man cannot know anything with assurance. The story of Babel undergirds this belief; everything that mankind attempts to know on its own, without God, will lead to confusion. As Friedrich notes, however, Montaigne does not fight this uncertainty by avoiding the vernacular, but rather embraces it, by choosing it as the language of composition for his *Essais*, and as the best means to represent the ambiguity and imperfection of existence:

He never expresses the need to secure for French, which he so loves and has mastered, a triumph over Latin. The admitted inferiority of this language does not limit him. Quite the contrary, it drives him even more strongly to make use of this language, as one who is imperfect obeying what is imperfect. We know this element of his wisdom: in what is imperfect it

respects the pauper's nobility of what is real.²³²

Certainly, Montaigne is not 'limited' by the vernacular. As Freidrich notes, labeling the vernacular as "imperfect" and "inferior" in Montaigne's eyes largely glosses over the complicated relationship that the author has with the French language. For Montaigne, who wishes in his early editions of the *Essais* to 'personalize' any linguistic system he utilizes, living vernaculars—with their capacity for change—present an advantage over dead language like Latin. But, by the end of his life, recognizing that the unstoppable mutability of the vernacular leads to instability, and, ultimately unreliability, Montaigne condemns it, along with any other human-controlled linguistic system, to inherent untrustworthiness.

²³² Freidrich, *Montaigne*, 282.

Conclusion : Babel, to “Le monde n’est que babil”

Reading through Montaigne’s essays, it is clear that the author’s interest in language verges on obsession; there is hardly a single essay in which he does not ponder over language at least once, sometimes digressing from seemingly unrelated topics to discourse lengthily on language (as he does famously, for example, in “Sur les vers de Virgile,” moving from a discourse on sex to a discussion about language).

Montaigne wants his language, as his ideas, to be uniquely his own, but finds himself limited by the constraints of communicating to others within an already prescribed linguistic system. Just as he hopes for a lawfully consistent social order, Montaigne nonetheless concedes that in order to create such an order, personalization of language can go only so far, and there must remain an underlying, externally-determined organization to linguistic systems.

The author is furthermore challenged by the fact that the transfer of ideas to words can never be a perfect one, as it is always influenced by a bevy of extra-linguistic elements. Voice, gesture, even clothing have the ability to influence the listener’s reception of the speaker’s words, and thus elocution becomes a major preoccupation for Montaigne. While Montaigne is

skeptical about the use of rhetoric to mask significance in speaking and writing, he recognizes the value of using voice and gesture to amplify meaning in spoken language; however, as a speaker, the author often finds himself betrayed by his own body and voice.

While there is a tendency to gloss over the context of sixteenth-century vernacular debates while discussing Montaigne's views on language, there is ample evidence to prove this approach an incomplete one. The issue of the expanding French lexicon was on the essayist's mind, as were those of translation, language learning, and other dilemmas that also appear in the works of vernacular treatise writers of the period. While he may not agree with all of the Pléiade initiatives to embellish the French language through poetic imitation and lexical invention, he shares with Du Bellay an understanding of the usefulness of expanding the lexicon through communication and conversation with local peoples.

Also at issue here, moreover, is the tendency to think of the sixteenth-century French vernacular debate as a largely Pléiade affair.²³³ While it is true that Du Bellay's *Deffence et Illustration* is the most well-recognized expression of the debate, lesser-known treatises about the vernacular such as

²³³ This is especially the case in comparisons of Montaigne with the sixteenth-century language debates. See for instance, Friedrich in his *Montaigne*, who while giving an excellent analysis of Montaigne's relationship with the vernacular in the *Essais*, discredits any potential influence of the Pléiade, and only points out the dissimilarity between Montaigne and Du Bellay and Ronsard, not considering any other treatise writers.

Mathieu's and Bovelles' raise issues about the establishment and embellishment of the vernacular in sixteenth century France which deepen the Pléiade's initiatives of lexical invention and poetic imitation. Questions of communication, and indeed, the reliability of communication within a budding national language remain to be explored. Vernacular texts such as Montaigne's *Essais*, while not conventionally explored in tandem with linguistic treatises, have much to offer to the debate.

Montaigne may point out some of the shortcomings of French in comparison to Latin in his work, but this does not stop him from composing his *Essais* in the vernacular, nor does it stop him from arguing for *clarity* in language, especially in the context of law and in human communication. While he consistently does not personally implicate himself in sixteenth-century debates over orthography and grammar reform, he does recognize that despite human—and indeed, linguistic—inconstancy, communication, like laws, can only be governed through order, and he concedes in the earlier editions of the *Essais* that if we are required to communicate through a necessarily disordered, post-Babel system, we should not confuse it anymore through attempts at spelling reform and lexical innovation; this connection with Babel becomes even more pertinent in the last editions to the *Essais*, as the author senses an escalation in the

variation of regional dialects around him, as well as an increased futility in trying to control such variation. Ultimately, in the “branloire perenne” of human existence, Montaigne’s vernacular philosophy remains paradoxically caught between embracing the inevitability of linguistic change and promoting the conservation of ‘common usage’ and tradition.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this study, I return to the Tournier citation in the Introduction and re-iterate the aptness of his words. France's literary identity is inherently and inextricably linked to its linguistic history, which, in turn, is highly influenced by *regional* identity. As I have shown in the preceding chapters, anxieties over vernacular identities were central to the works of Rabelais, Du Bellay, and Montaigne. However, while these three authors were certainly aware of contemporary treatises on the vernacular addressing issues such as lexicographic changes and grammar, in their own works, vernacular anxieties center more on questions such as regional identity and mother tongue, matters also patent in this twenty-first century Tournier editorial.

While dialectal variation is more commonly studied in the context of earlier Italian treatises on the vernacular, I have shown that this may be an incomplete approach, and that modern critics should address the use of regional dialect on the French side of the language debates as well. Certainly, as Lazare Sainéan had already shown at the turn of the twentieth century, Rabelais' use of regionalisms and dialectal variants in his work

verges on obsession; however, to this date, no one has systematically examined *why* Rabelais has certain characters use specific dialects. While the linguistic diversity of his books is widely recognized as a distinguishing factor of his *oeuvre*, up until this point in critical examinations of Rabelais, it has been assumed that the election of particular dialects for different characters was done indiscriminately. As I have shown in my examination of the Limousine schoolboy episode, this is erroneous.

Rabelais' use of regional dialect in many ways echoes the vastly multilingual France he lived in, so it follows that his preference for certain dialects over others is not completely haphazard, but reflects those partialities that already existed in sixteenth-century France. As France became more administratively centralized, sixteenth-century society soon gave more preference to dialects from the 'heart' of France—most notably, those of the Loire Valley and the Ile-de-France—and dialects at the extreme poles of the country became increasingly ostracized. This marginalization is echoed in Rabelais with the linguistic identification of the *écolier limousin*. As I showed in my first chapter, Rabelais' election of a marginalized *oc* dialect for this character is neither random nor insignificant; rather, it helps explain why the *écolier* is treated so violently in comparison to other characters in the work who are guilty of similar linguistic 'crimes' to his own.

By focusing on the *écolier limousin* episode, I do not suggest that this is the only instance of dialectal discrimination in Rabelais' work. First of all, I hope to debunk the myth that pervades modern critical analysis of this piece—that it is simply a play on the Latin *écumeur* tradition, popular in medieval farces and extended into the early modern period. Undoubtedly the *écumeur* tradition is at the root of this episode, but Rabelais takes it in a different direction by according his Latin 'skimmer' a regional identity. Furthermore, I also hope that with this discovery about the *écolier*, scholars will extend their examinations of other characters in Rabelais' work to include an exploration of regional linguistic identity. There remains much to be done in this area, especially regarding the preferred *tourangeau* dialect, of which little is known about the sixteenth-century variety.

In my chapter on Du Bellay, I transitioned from a focus on regional dialect to that of regional identity and native, literary history. Perhaps what is most essential here is the understanding of the inherent link between language, literature, and history. This is most evident in the Aneau's criticism of Du Bellay in his *Quintil horatien*, but it is also anchored in my intertextual analysis of Du Bellay and Marot. The idea of using historical *native* sources as models for future, French poets goes against everything Du Bellay argues for in his *Deffence*. In ignoring this critical, native, heritage, and

instead looking towards a too ancient and foreign past, Du Bellay risks losing the linguistic base upon which his current French language is founded; his new vernacular literature is left in an indeterminate state, with nowhere to go with only an derivative, forged linguistic history to look to. And, as we shall see, even if he never admits it directly in treatise-form, in his poetry, Du Bellay eventually comes to realize as unsound virtually everything that Aneau criticizes him for in the *Quintil*—especially in regards to using native French sources for imitation—and we see a vastly different philosophy in his later poetry than that which is presented in the *Deffence*.

Du Bellay's anxieties about the vernacular are less linguistic than they are stylistic in nature; he struggles with reconciling his ideas about poetic imitation and the use of ancient sources to create new verse in a stronger, 'illustrated' form of his native vernacular. Curiously, while we can see a stubborn willingness to adhere to his own model of poetic imitation in his earlier works written in France, once the author follows his cousin, the Cardinal Du Bellay, to Rome, we see a gradual shift to more native, French models. I showed this contrast by completing an intertextual examination of Du Bellay's Roman poetry with that of Clément Marot, the poet perhaps most seminally linked to those 'native' traditions that Du Bellay shunned in his *Deffence et Illustration*. I argued that this shift occurs not only because of

homesickness in a general sense, but also because of an anxiety of communication; at the same time that the author is making commentary about his exiled linguistic situation in Rome, he also makes a conscious decision to move to native, French models of poetry. The longer he stays in Rome, the more disconnected Du Bellay feels from his own linguistic and literary heritage; at his homecoming at the end of the *Regrets*, the poet recognizes the error of his ways and directs his poetic muses to a “charge plus belle”—that of the French, native tradition.

Ironically enough, while Du Bellay’s earlier works may be following the formula of a ‘higher’ style and imitation of classical sources that he touts in the *Deffence*, by the end of his career, in the *Regrets*, he shuns imitation and embellished language entirely, desiring instead to express his feelings in his own, simple words; that is, he essentially wants to be the poet that he shuns in his linguistic treatise, he who is “facile” to comprehend and who “ne s’eloigne point de la commune maniere de parler.” Without ever admitting it as such, through his ‘borrowing’ of Marotic styles and conventions, and indeed, even the ‘imitation’ of exact Marotic formulations such as those outlined in this study, Du Bellay represses throughout his entire career a longing to be like the Marot, a poet who always remains faithful to his own poetic voice and indigenous literary heritage. After the years of denial that

are his earlier works such as *L'Olive* and *Les Divers Jeux Rustiques*, this repressed desire is finally exposed in the *Regrets*, where the mature poet realizes that he can no longer hide behind a voice that does not truly belong to him.

While Du Bellay's revelation in the *Regrets* should give cause to the modern reader to go back, re-read, and reconsider the 'old-fashioned' poets like Marot that the author shuns in his *Deffence*, today's readers are disappointingly still influenced by Du Bellay's original analysis of the precursor poet who still bears traces of *Grand Rhétoriqueur* principles. As Defaux notes :

Consciemment ou non, ce réquisitoire mordant continue aujourd'hui de colorer notre perception de l'œuvre de Marot, il s'interpose toujours indûment entre elle et nous, nous contraignant à une comparaison qui, de Marot aux poètes de la Pléiade et de ceux-ci à Marot, tourne automatiquement au désavantage de ce dernier.²³⁴

Consciously or not, today this biting indictment continues to

²³⁴ « Clément Marot: Une Poétique du silence et de la liberté, » xxx.

color our perception of Marot's oeuvre, it continues to unduly come between us, constraining us to a comparison which, from Marot to the poets of the Pléiade and from them to Marot, automatically turns to the disadvantage of the latter.

This prejudice seems to extend into modern critical reception of Du Bellay as well, as a great deal of early modern scholars still choose to examine Du Bellay's imitative techniques in light of his classical Latin and Greek, rather than French, sources.²³⁵ While critics are quick to point out the many discrepancies of the *Deffence*, as well as the fact that Du Bellay himself was not very consistent on following his own advice in his works, they nonetheless blindly follow his hypocritical prescription in the treatise, and push aside potential French intertextual studies for more 'obvious' Greek and Latin ones.

While a few modern critics such as Timothy Hampton provide some very insightful analysis of Du Bellay's poetry in a more synchronic context, the majority have been unsuccessful in moving away from the more diachronic, flawed, classical approach and looking at potential native sources such as Marot. This is not to say that Marot is never considered in

²³⁵ See, for example, Ferguson in *Trials of Desire*, and Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982).

intertextual analysis with Du Bellay; in fact, Defaux does an excellent job of pointing out many similarities between the two poets' works in the introduction to his edition of Marot's complete poetic works, and Hampton raises some interesting similarities in his book on nation building and its influence on sixteenth-century literature in France as well. Nonetheless, these remain fairly patchwork analyses, and have more to do with broader historical themes than they do with examining more specific intertextual links between the two authors. As Jerry C. Nash noted in his article in the collection, *Pre-Pléiade Poetry* in 1985, reconsideration of the notion of early, native French poets such as Marot as being completely separate from and having no influence upon the later Brigade poets is of critical importance, yet more than twenty-five years later, little has been done to address his call to action. Certainly, in this study, which is by all accounts only a rudimentary examination, I have provided ample evidence to prove that it is high time for a more in-depth analysis of Marot's influence on Du Bellay. We, as critical scholars, need to stop following Du Bellay's ill-formed, hypocritical opinion of Marot in the *Deffence*, and instead recognize him for what he is—a truly rich source of native textual authority.

In Montaigne—perhaps more blatantly than with the other two authors—we see an inherent struggle with vernacular identity. Purportedly

raised with Latin as his mother tongue, the French vernacular has a peculiar status as a *second* language for Montaigne. With this confused linguistic identity, Montaigne expresses a great deal of anxiety in determining the most effective and reliable means of communication. On an individual level, Montaigne recognizes that even his own language is not truly his own; he is unable to completely control his body language and countenance, to the point that he recognizes he is giving off messages which are not truly his own. On a larger level of *communication*, Montaigne worries a great deal about clarity in language; this is a concern he shares with fellow jurist, Abel Mathieu. Because language is the only thing linking us to each other, it is necessarily that we share a common code with rigid rules. For this reason, Montaigne argues against convolution in language through over-manipulation of orthography and the lexicon.

Curiously, Montaigne's queries on the vernacular may have more in common with the earlier—and decidedly *anti*-vernacular—treatise writer, Charles Bovelles, than they do with Mathieu. As much as Montaigne dreams of having a “personalized” system of communication in which to transmit his thoughts and feelings, he also recognizes that because of the constraints of the society he lives in, this will never be entirely possible. Indeed, in emphasizing the idea of Babel when discussing the vernacular, both men

substantiate their conviction that the vernacular is inherently unstable and thus, un-reliable. Because of this, Bovelles chose to write exclusively in what he deems the most “static” language—Latin. Montaigne chooses French as the language of composition for his *Essais* anyways, conceding that because of changing nature of the language it was written in, it will be unrecognizable to future generations. This is a conviction that we see increase in the later *couches* of Montaigne’s essays, as we watch the author become increasingly convinced of the futility of trying to make any order in the vernacular.

With the idea of Babel, I return to my original questions in the Introduction: how can we view communicative breakdown in each of these authors in the context of ‘manipulating’ the vernacular?

Much of the comedy in Rabelais results from occasions of communicative breakdown. I provided a few examples in my chapter; the Thaumaste debate, the encounter with the Sibyll of Panzoust, the first meeting with Panurge, Janotus’ arguments to bring back the Parisian bells, and the meeting with the *écolier limousin*. Rabelais views the dialectal variety in France as a source of entertainment; the confusion which occurs when people who don’t share the same linguistic system try to communicate is portrayed as comic, even ridiculous. While Rabelais believes in the arbitrariness of language, however, he still recognizes some ways of speaking

as superior to others. We see the dark side of vernacular manipulation in Rabelais with the case of the *écolier limousin*, who is not only punished for abusing Latin, but more importantly, I argue, for misusing the vernacular; that is, he is punished for *not* using a standard dialectal form of French—notably those of l’Ile de France and the Loire Valley.

In Du Bellay, we stretch our definition of ‘communication’ to include that of ‘poetic’ communication in the vernacular, and here again, we see a definite breakdown. Du Bellay, the proponent of illustrating and embellishing the French language nonetheless tries to do so without the support of French linguistic and literary history. By doing so, he loses his own poetic voice, and in the end of his career, he is only able to lament the time he spent chasing non-native sources of poetic inspiration.

And finally, in Montaigne, we see the true incarnation of ‘communicative breakdown’ in the author’s musings on the vernacular with the idea of Babel. Despite his desire for his own, personal system of communication, Montaigne’s juristic background forces him to seek clarity in language, and accordingly, he is a proponent of consistent rules in vernacular language systems, and an opponent of neologisms and foreign borrowings. But, by the end of his career, as he watches the ever-changing vernacular around him, he concedes that because human beings are

inherently inconstant, so must be our language systems, and he concludes that God must have confused our languages for good reason—human beings are simply too unpredictable to be trusted to create regularity in any communicative system they are bestowed.

In the end, Montaigne probably shouldn't have been so worried; while sixteenth-century French is orthographically, grammatically, and syntactically distinct from the French of today, the fact that we are still reading these authors proves that the vernacular may have been a little less mutable and a little more constant than he gave it credit for so many centuries ago. But it is also curious that in France, many of the anxieties that these authors expressed about the vernacular are still being discussed today, pointing to a national anxiety over the vernacular that runs even deeper than these sixteenth-century convictions.

In closing, I argue first that in regarding the literary history of a national literature, we must not ignore the corresponding national linguistic history. And certainly, as I have proven here, we need to think of that linguistic history not as a stagnant, unilateral system, but a vibrant, multidimensional one. We may need to re-think the approach to the study of sixteenth-century French literature and language with more of a twenty-first-century 'French studies' eye— that is, we must not think of sixteenth-

century French as a single linguistic entity, but rather, as an ecology of language; a living, multi-dialectal system with variance across different genres, which changes according to the political and social environment that it is in, as well as with the circumstances of any particular ‘user.’ There must be much to discover about these texts if we adopt such an ‘ecological’ approach to language in our study of literature, and view sixteenth-century French and its variants not as a stagnant entity, but as a system undergoing constant metamorphosis.

Finally, a call for action: in modern language departments today, in which early modern French literature courses are becoming increasingly rare, it is essential that as educators, we can validate *why* it is that the texts we love so much are worth studying. Indeed, sixteenth-century French literature can be viewed as unapproachable—even graduate students with strong language skills struggle with the inconsistency of sixteenth-century French, and most undergraduates today are sorely lacking in their knowledge of Classical Antiquity, philosophy, and literary history that abound in references in these works. Many professors of early modern French literature have today all but stopped teaching Rabelais, for example, arguing that there is simply too much background knowledge to present to students in order to decrypt even the prologues of his books. But if we can bring relevance to these texts by

drawing out specific sociolinguistic issues in them that also exist in our modern-day world—as I have done here with the issue of anxieties of communication in the vernacular—we provide a blanket of familiarity to the modern reader, and help open a window into a literary world that was previously closed to them.

We must stop lamenting the education that modern students lack, and instead, adopt our approach in teaching these seemingly ‘inaccessible’ texts by using contexts with which modern readers are familiar. Keeping the study of language and communication at the forefront of sixteenth-century texts, as I have done here, is certainly one worthy option. As Montaigne argued over four centuries ago, ‘language is the only thing that binds mankind together.’ The sociolinguistic issues in these texts provide a connection across the centuries that may be more resilient than any obscure historical, philosophical, or literary one. Let us, then, use this continuing yoking force of language and communication to our advantage, and offer it to modern readers as the key to access these early modern authors.

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